

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 482 835

SP 041 808

AUTHOR Kaagan, Stephen S.
TITLE 30 Reflective Staff Development Exercises for Educators.
ISBN ISBN-0-7619-3884-2
PUB DATE 2003-11-00
NOTE 113p.
AVAILABLE FROM Corwin Press, Inc., A Sage Publications Company, 2455 Teller Road, Thousand Oaks, CA 91320-2218 (hardbound: ISBN-0-7619-3884-2, \$65.95; paperbound: ISBN-0-7619-3885-0, \$29.95). Tel: 800-818-7243 (Toll Free); Fax: 800-417-2466 (Toll Free); e-mail: order@corwinpress.com; Web site: <http://www.corwinpress.com>.
PUB TYPE Books (010) -- Guides - Classroom - Teacher (052) -- Guides - Non-Classroom (055)
EDRS PRICE EDRS Price MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS
DESCRIPTORS Change Strategies; Class Activities; Cooperative Learning; Educational Change; Elementary Secondary Education; *Faculty Development; Inservice Teacher Education; Instructional Leadership; Leadership Training; *Teacher Improvement
IDENTIFIERS *Coaching; Reflective Thinking

ABSTRACT

This book presents a guide for educators who want to gain new ideas and a fresh perspective on staff development. It promotes individual and collective learning of all participants as they undertake formal staff development while enhancing the success and performance of the entire educational system. The 30 reflective exercises have been designed to meet the specific needs of educators and include: fostering effective change, developing leadership skill, identifying and capitalizing on staff assets, and gaining and using new perspectives. The three parts focus on: (1) "The Power of Reflective Exercises for Staff Development" (e.g., purpose and audience, guiding principles, and format of the exercises); (2) "30 Reflective Exercises" (maps and markers to expand the mental landscape; multiplicity, mutuality, and meaning: working collaboratively; and mission maintenance and momentum: moving to action); and (3) "Choosing Appropriate Exercises" (four vignettes). A resource presents exercises arranged by topic and purpose. (Contains 20 references.) (SM)

ED 482 835

SP

SPTR
0352

30

REFLECTIVE Staff Development EXERCISES for Educators

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)

- ☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
- ☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
- Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND
DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL IN
MICROFICHE ONLY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

G. Alkema

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES
INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

2B

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

STEPHEN S. KAAGAN

SP 041 808

30

REFLECTIVE
Staff Development
EXERCISES for Educators

30

REFLECTIVE
Staff Development
EXERCISES for Educators

STEPHEN S. KAAGAN



CORWIN PRESS, INC.
A Sage Publications Company
Thousand Oaks, California

Copyright © 2004 by Corwin Press.

All rights reserved. When forms and sample documents are included, their use is authorized only by educators, local school sites, and/or noncommercial entities who have purchased the book. Except for that usage, no part of this book may be reproduced or utilized in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

For information:



Corwin Press
A Sage Publications Company
2455 Teller Road
Thousand Oaks, California 91320
www.corwinpress.com

Sage Publications Ltd.
6 Bonhill Street
London EC2A 4PU
United Kingdom

Sage Publications India Pvt. Ltd.
B-42, Panchsheel Enclave
Post Box 4109
New Delhi 110 017 India

Printed in the United States of America

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Kaagan, Stephen S.
30 reflective staff development exercises for educators/
Stephen S. Kaagan.
p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 0-7619-3884-2 (Cloth)—ISBN 0-7619-3885-0 (Paper)

1. Teachers—In-service training—Handbooks, manuals, etc. 2. Teachers' workshops—Planning—Handbooks, manuals, etc. I. Title: Thirty reflective staff development exercises for educators. II. Title.

LB1731.K22 2004

370'.71 '5—dc21

2003011440

03 04 05 06 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Acquisitions Editor:	Rachel Livsey
Editorial Assistant:	Phyllis Cappello
Production Editor:	Melanie Birdsall
Copy Editor:	Teresa Herlinger
Typesetter:	C&M Digital (P) Ltd.
Illustrator:	Robert Greisen
Proofreader:	Cheryl Rivard
Cover Designer:	Michael Dubowe
Production Artist:	Lisa Miller

Contents

Acknowledgments	vii
About the Author	ix
Part I: The Power of Reflective Exercises for Staff Development	1
Purpose and Audience	1
Guiding Principles	2
Making the Exception the Rule	3
Committing to Organizational Learning Concepts	4
Important Caveats	5
Current Practice	6
The Contributions of Senge et al.	7
A Personal Approach to Teaching and Consulting	8
Organization of the Book	9
Format of the Exercises	11
Part II: 30 Reflective Exercises	13
<i>Maps and Markers: Expanding the Mental Landscape</i>	13
1. Animal Attributes	15
2. Ancestors	17
3. Pushpins	19
4. Surprise Me	22
5. E-xplore Assets	24
6. Instant History	27
7. Bringing the Outside In	29
8. Best, Worst	31
9. Don't Surprise Me	33
10. Leadership Then, Now, Into the Future	35
<i>Multiplicity, Mutuality, and Meaning: Working Collaboratively</i>	39
11. Dashing Dual Interview	40
12. E-xplore Perspectives	43
13. Snapshots	46
14. Rotating Pencils	49
15. Listening for Assumptions	51
16. Fruits of Silence	54

17. See	56
18. Patchwork Perspectives	59
19. Stakes	61
20. Vision Sketch	64
 <i>Mission Maintenance and Momentum: Moving to Action</i>	 67
21. Begin, Begin, Begin	68
22. Modest Expectations	70
23. Informed Purpose	72
24. Beginning at the End	74
25. Context Map	76
26. The "View From Downtown"	78
27. E-xplore by Association	80
28. Unheard Voices	82
29. Blame Game	84
30. Standing Offer	87
 Part III: Choosing Appropriate Exercises	 89
Vignette 1: Narrowing the Generation Gap	91
Vignette 2: Deepening the Discourse	94
Vignette 3: Traversing Unfamiliar Territory	96
Vignette 4: Diminishing Divisiveness	98
Concluding Comments	100
 Resource: Exercises Arranged by Topic and Purpose	 103
Bibliography	105

Acknowledgments

The receptivity of countless students and clients to the constructivist approach to teaching and consulting represented in this book warrants acknowledgement and gratitude. When students complain that the work that I ask them to do makes them think too hard, then I know I am on the right track. When one of those students wrote a cryptic note at the end of a semester-long course on leadership that said, "When is this guy going to tell us what to do?—Never, Ha, Ha," I took it as an indicator of significant learning.

I particularly want to acknowledge the efforts of one person with whom I have worked recently. He quietly lent breadth and depth to the approach taken in this book. Chau Thien Hiep served as a translator for a team development session I facilitated for university and school staff in Cantho, Vietnam. He managed to translate not only words but complex ideas across firmly drawn cultural and linguistic lines—to the point of providing corroboration that learning through reflective exercises knows no cultural boundaries.

Finally, it is essential to acknowledge that the idea for this book originated with Rachel Livsey, editor at Corwin Press. She posed the possibility of my writing a book like this. And when it started to take shape, she offered wise and creative counsel that I believe improved the product immeasurably.

The contributions of the following reviewers are gratefully acknowledged:

Marcia L. Tate, EdD
Executive Director of Professional Development
DeKalb County School System
Decatur, GA

Hal Portner
Educational Consultant
New Teacher Induction and Mentoring
Northampton, MA

Karen A. Anderson
Educational Consultant
Executive Director, Texas Staff Development Council
Mesquite, TX

Cynthia R. Harrison
Director of Staff Development
Adams Twelve Five-Star Schools
Thornton, CO

Marti Richardson
President
National Staff Development Council
Knoxville, TN

Carolyn Chapman
Creative Learning Connection
Thomson, GA

About the Author



Stephen S. Kaagan is currently Professor of Education at Michigan State University. His teaching interests are leadership, organizational analysis, and administrative practice. He has a doctorate from Harvard University and has been honored with several awards, including membership in the Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce, London, England, and honorary doctorates from Williams College in Massachusetts and Green Mountain College in Vermont. Before coming to Michigan State University in 1991, Steve Kaagan served as President of Hurricane Island Outward Bound (1989–91), Commissioner of Education for the State of Vermont (1982–88), and Provost at Pratt Institute in New York City (1977–82).

He has written extensively on leadership, organizational development, the role of the arts in schooling, and assessment and accountability. Selected publications include: *Developing Teacher Leaders: How Teacher Leadership Enhances School Success* (2002), with Frank Crowther et al.; *Managing Successful School Reform: The Legacy of Chris Argyris*, a special edition of the *International Journal of Educational Management* (2001), coedited with Frank Crowther; *Leadership Games: Experiential Learning for Organizational Development* (1999); and *Leadership Lessons: From a Life of Character and Purpose in Public Affairs* (1997). Professor Kaagan is a Charter Board Member of ArtServe Michigan. In the late 1980s, he served as a member of a distinguished panel on "Making the System Work Better for Poor Kids," a Carnegie Foundation-sponsored project of Harvard's John F. Kennedy School of Government.

Steve Kaagan's experience spans an academic career; wide-ranging service as an advisor to government agencies, corporations, and educational institutions; military experience in the USMC Reserve; extensive travel throughout the world, including mountaineering expeditions in the Himalayas, Andes, and Cascades; and Rugby Football Refereeing for the U.S. Rugby Football Union.

The Power of Reflective Exercises for Staff Development



To quote one of the exercises that appears later in this book, let's "Begin at the End":

- If you want to develop with your colleagues a coordinated teaching and community relations strategy to achieve more positive student outcomes (not only test scores but other evidence of achievement)
- If you want to examine with your colleagues the legitimacy of current educational practices in the interests of more positive student outcomes
- And if you know that regardless of district, state, or federal policies, improved working relationships with your colleagues will enhance student achievement

... then this book deserves your attention.

PURPOSE AND AUDIENCE

This book is about enhancing the performance of schools as successful organizations, ones in which both staff and students are active and productive learners. Most directly, it allows school staff the opportunity to determine, to a great extent, the content and course of their own development as education professionals. It is designed especially for professionals who want to undertake a stimulating journey toward more effective working relationships with their colleagues. Professionals who believe that the "whole" of collective efforts is infinitely greater than the "sum" of individual efforts. Professionals who are convinced that their own learning is prerequisite to the learning of students—and that the learning of students is enhanced by their own learning. Professionals who understand that

staff development must *embody* new ideas about learning, not just *espouse* new ideas about learning. Professionals who enjoy challenging themselves and who see playfulness as an essential ingredient of professional self-improvement. Professionals who hunger for new ideas and fresh perspectives. In sum, this book is for those seeking to open themselves to different ways of learning and working with each other and with students.

Most particularly, the text is for teachers, counselors, administrators, and staff developers as they undertake formal staff development efforts. It also encourages them to take advantage of opportunities for professional learning in such forums as staff meetings, school improvement team sessions, site-based management group meetings, and curriculum planning sessions.

At the same time, the ideas and exercises in the book can meet the needs of citizen leaders and parents who are as interested in self-development as their educator colleagues—people who not only want to see the investment in their schools pay off but also seek to become inspired and critical learners themselves. The exercises can be as useful to a group of parents and citizen leaders seeking to foster improvement in their schools as to a group of education professionals out to do the same.

■ GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The guiding principles of the text are as follows:

- Educators can and should take responsibility for their own professional development. While there are advantages to securing the services of outside experts to assist with both the substance and process of development, there are compelling advantages to educators shepherding their own development. This book not only advocates this principle but offers readers a set of tools to implement it.

- If school staff—teachers, administrators, counselors, staff developers—want to adopt fundamentally different approaches to working with each other and with their students, then they have to do different things with each other, from the very beginning of their development activities through to their completion. They have to experience modes of interaction that reflect the developmental challenges they will confront in their workplace—questioning and adjusting operating assumptions, assessing and reframing goals and values, and probing and reshaping relationships. (This principle is the “bell that rings in my ears” every time I interact with a group of professionals who say that they are interested in examining and improving their practices, anxious to get out of well-worn patterns of behavior, questing for renewal and revitalization.)

- All exercises chosen for staff development purposes, especially those chosen as starters, should exemplify sound learning concepts. With few exceptions, they should be responsive to the proverb,

I hear and I forget.

I see and I remember.

I do and I understand.

This is to say that good staff development should take advantage of the real context and circumstances in which the participants find themselves as professionals. A collection of individuals from the same workplace with different interests and talents and a set of prevailing relationships, brought together in a particular space at a particular time—these can provide ample grist for learning if the right elements are combined and creativity is applied to the design of the development experience. If mediated properly, experience can be a most powerful teacher.

- Staff development should in significant part be about finding allies, colleagues, even soul mates for ideas that are worth pursuing. So much of the activity that takes place in schools is isolating for the professionals who work there. Good professional development should counter this sense of isolation. Thus, exercises should be rich in opportunities for staff to become more familiar with each other as professionals, to see how they might join forces, to begin to view each other in a new, more understanding and appreciative light.

These principles point to the conclusion that staff development is inevitably about collective capacity building. In fact, the two words, "staff" and "development," imply collective capacity building. Thus, education professionals who attend staff development sessions should feel that they have learned important things about each other and about how to do their jobs better. And they should return to their daily responsibilities uplifted, renewed, and ready to assume new challenges. They should feel more empowered and enabled to act on behalf of the children and youth they serve.

MAKING THE EXCEPTION THE RULE ■

Unfortunately, the outcome to which the principles point is still the exception rather than the rule. Too many staff development sessions are one-shot events that professionals have been compelled to attend and from which they learn less than they would like—and than their students deserve. Too often they return to their jobs more convinced than ever that whatever they accomplish will be attributable to their own lights, their own perseverance as individual professionals. It is the unfortunate reality that many education professionals feel more alone in facing the real challenges of their job after a staff development session than they did before it.

This situation must change because it is a waste of human capacity and a squandering of scarce resources. The current exception needs to become the future rule. Education professionals and their charges—school-attending

children and youth—deserve no less. Local communities and the nation deserve no less. Achieving this needed change in practice, however, requires significant shifts in policy at all levels—federal, state, and local. And preceding this policy shift is a necessary shift in attitude and assumption.

■ COMMITTING TO ORGANIZATIONAL LEARNING CONCEPTS

All those concerned with staff development have to agree that its underlying aim is learning—both individual and organizational learning. This means that those who oversee and influence, and design and carry out, staff development programs must first of all adopt the ideas of theorists like Chris Argyris, Edgar Schein, Don Schon, and Peter Senge. Similarly, they must subscribe to positions advanced by educational theorists like Michael Fullan, Tom Guskey, Anne Lieberman, Linda Darling-Hammond, Seymour Sarason, and Roland Barth. The latter have, among other things, contextualized sound learning concepts in school operations and cited their implications for the design of staff development programs. Some of the central concepts they identify include the following:

- The necessity of reflective practice by professionals, individually and collectively—the ability to step back regularly from daily responsibilities and pose hard questions about functions, roles, and performance, to focus on why things are being done the way they are and whether they might be done differently. True learning communities function in this way.
- The distinction between theories-in-action and espoused theories—the differences between what school professionals really do and how they really interact, as opposed to what the mission statement mounted on the wall of the school foyer says about what they do and how they interact.
- The power of assumptions in shaping school culture and determining the behavior of all who work in the school. These are the tacit beliefs that distinguish the acceptable from the unacceptable. If, for example, it is assumed that teachers should not share professional knowledge with each other, then they will not.

The essential requirement of this kind of learning is that professionals explicitly and jointly commit to reaching for broader and deeper perspectives on their demanding roles, that they create the time and space to ask themselves and each other a few basic questions, such as the following:

- As professionals, what are we doing in this school? What are our most dominant “theories-in-action”?
- What are we really doing in this school? What underlying assumptions drive our behavior as professionals in this school?

- What should we be doing differently? What do we want to change to better fulfill our collective aims? What can we do to narrow the gap between our espoused theories and our theories-in-action?

A key aspect of these ideas is that each and every participant in a staff development process has an active, in fact, determining, role to play. Indeed, it takes the minds of all staff to address honestly the challenging questions noted above. Thus, participants in staff development, grounded in sound learning principles, are by definition not the audience in a play presented by outsiders—they are the principal actors. Each has an important part in composing a better future.

The principles of sound staff development cited under the section headed “Guiding Principles” are remarkably consistent with the ideas outlined by the theorists mentioned above:

- Participants take responsibility for their own learning.
- Development exercises reflect high-impact learning.
- Development exercises engender collective energy.

IMPORTANT CAVEATS

The material in this book is meant to be supportive of established ideas, not generative of new ones. The exercises described in the next section are intended as ways to engage participants in a process of individual and organizational learning. The book sets forth experiences that can aid an ambitious learning agenda. Yet it does not include the full range of strategies, tactics, and activities that would comprise a comprehensive staff development initiative. Simply put, this book is an attempt to “start and keep a ball rolling” in a way that is consistent with important theories about how individuals and organizations learn.

At the same time, the relationship between theory and practice is such that new practices sometimes engender new ideas as much as the other way around. In fact, theory is often enriched, deepened, even reshaped as practitioners attempt to act in concert with theory. So readers should view this book as a significant beginning to turning staff development sessions into substantial learning sessions. Yet they should also understand that they will likely affect the development of ideas about learning in the process.

The way staff development sessions begin and the way they are carried out signal to a great extent the outcomes they will achieve. The beginning of a session, for example, almost always foretells what will follow. Significant indicators of success or failure cluster in large part in the first few minutes of joint work. Furthermore, the right set of moves in the middle of a session determines whether the learning from a previous segment is captured or if it evaporates into thin air. Simple as these axioms are, it is remarkable how seldom they are heeded, as staff development designers

and session leaders think about how to get sessions under way and maintain their momentum.

With this said, it is important to note that the exercises in this book are not intended as "icebreakers" or "sidelights." The former term connotes a softening, warming, or melting of hardened, cold, or frozen conditions that may exist as people nervously assemble for a new experience with each other. The latter connotes a welcome distraction, capable of capturing interest but relatively unrelated to the substantive work at hand. Following the "icebreaker" or "sidelight," participants become more amenable, less resistant, to facing the task at hand. The "real work" of the session then commences or resumes.

We have all participated in staff development efforts punctuated by an artfully deployed "icebreaker" or "sidelight." Unfortunately, what often follows in its path is well-patterned drudgery—one-way conveyance of ideas with relatively little earnest interchange. Absent is mutual learning about the collective assets of participants, reflection on current practice, uncovering and addressing key assumptions, or generating new ways of looking at old problems.

Understand that "icebreakers" and "sidelights" have a legitimate role, but it is usually a minor one that is tangential to the task of supporting individual and organizational learning. Much more than softening, warming, or melting has to happen at the beginning of a serious staff development session. Much more than enticing distraction has to happen in the middle. In fact, these experiences, viewed largely as parenthetical, should shed their parentheses and connect seamlessly with the entire flow of the work. They should herald the work ahead, reinforce the work behind, provide the participants with robust cues about what is in store for them, and cap off what they have just learned. Most important, the exercises have to stimulate and inspire, providing a sense of anticipation that will be rewarded and a challenge that will be fulfilled.

Included in an expanded portfolio of possible supportive experiences are such factors as a "call" to participants to become active and stay active throughout the session; a robust suggestion or reminder that all the participants represent significant learning resources for each other; a signal that participants will be encouraged to experiment with modes of behavior that will promote their becoming more professionally effective; and an object lesson confirming that the task of running an effective school is not the job of the titular head of the school alone, but is owned by everyone in the room.

■ CURRENT PRACTICE

By and large, the present repertoire of experiences offered in support of staff development reflects relatively little imagination and only tenuous connection to the main topics of the development sessions. They rarely exemplify the exciting, challenging, and universally engaging focus of the sessions themselves.

Here is the norm: The session leader provides a self-introduction, followed by an introduction of the topic to be treated, and then articulates the objectives for the session. Frequently, the session leader asks the participants at the beginning to offer something about themselves or their expectations for the session. But rarely is this important data synthesized and established as a reference point for the work of the group as it unfolds in the session itself. Then the intended work begins in earnest. Generally, participants pause in the middle of a development experience and are allowed time for social interaction. Since the session itself has offered little of this, the break usually runs over, and it is difficult to reclaim the participants for the work that has been put before them.

In addition, the meeting space itself almost always inhibits free and easy interchange among participants. Although the session leader's intent may be to encourage open interaction, the furniture is often arranged in a way that makes this difficult. Tables consume most of the available floor space in the room. This arrangement precludes much open interchange among participants, and it is frequently difficult for all participants to see each other's faces. During the session, the energy in the room is with the facilitator, not with the participants. Participants expect, and usually receive, little acknowledgment of their central role. The principal focus remains on the session facilitator for most of the available time.

The conditions just described may only partially reflect those that you as readers have experienced. Yet it is probably fair to say that the character and aspect of most contemporary staff development efforts do not support the group work proposed by organizational learning theorists. They do not foster a reflective capacity on the part of school professionals bent on improving the quality of their efforts in schools. As a consequence, there is little attention to the task of uncovering the underlying assumptions that drive behavior in the school as an organization, with the ultimate aim of altering those assumptions in favor of improved performance.

THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF SENGE ET AL. ■

Undoubtedly the most popular and best accepted representation of organizational learning concepts is the five disciplines that Peter Senge et al. outline in *The Fifth Discipline*, *The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook*, and *Schools That Learn*. The five so-called disciplines are personal mastery, systems thinking, mental models, shared vision, and team learning.

Personal mastery simply reaffirms that the ability of an organization to learn is dependent on the capacity of key individuals to learn and grow. Such learning and growth correlates with the individual's confidence and expertise-gathering skills.

Systems thinking recognizes that every element of an organizational system affects every other element. Altering one practice has a significant impact on others. Those seeking to change complex systems like schools have to

be cognizant of essential interactive effects within them as they move to improve their functioning.

Mental models refers to the assumption-making penchants of all who work in organizational contexts. What we do as organizational actors and how we see what we do will to a large extent dictate how *well* we do. If we really see schools as assemblages of individual work contexts called classrooms, then our behavior as professionals will be dictated by that mental model. If, on the contrary, we see schools as highly integrated work settings framed by common purposes, then our actions will follow.

Shared vision (easy to say, hard to do) means that group members artfully discuss purposes, aims, and missions with each other until they achieve enough common understanding and appreciation of each other's points of view that they can declare a coherent, collective direction—and pursue it vigorously.

Team learning is just that—the interactive approaches that group members, possessing a clear, shared sense of direction or vision, can take to promote mutual professional learning and thus come closer to attaining that vision.

■ A PERSONAL APPROACH TO TEACHING AND CONSULTING

Over the past couple of decades, I have oriented my own teaching and consulting to the ideas of Argyris, Schein, and Schon, as extended by Senge et al., Fullan, Sarason, and the like. Below is a guide I use with whom I work, to give them a sense of what they might expect from our collaboration. It was originally written as a way of introducing a different approach to leadership development, but its message is equally valid for a host of other topics that might warrant staff development—everything from collaborative learning to whole-language instruction.

The principal “text” used here is *experiences we will share*. “Reading,” i.e., decoding and understanding, this text will help you to develop your capacity to reflect more deeply and broadly on what happens in your work lives. In light of joint reflections on our common experiences (first) and of expert opinion in books and articles (second), we will prod each other to construct new ideas about what comprises effective practice.

As colleagues, we will begin to frame new ideas from these common experiences about our practice as professionals. When you formulate a project or initiative, you should make as many explicit references to your own experiences as to expert perspectives drawn from published books and articles. Experts rely to a great extent on ideas that are formed in the wake of their own experiences. So, for example, if our assigned task is learning about leadership, you will essentially be doing the same thing that the likes of Warren Bennis and Peter Senge do when they generate ideas about leadership and organizational functioning.

Experience to me includes a wide array of interactions of individuals with their environment. The experiences participants bring to the ones we share are a baseline, to be sure. And it is important that we know enough about group members' "real-world" experiences, both to build on and play off of them.

Included in our shared experiences will be individual and group exercises or problems, service projects, and field analyses. Under the heading of exercises or problems are case studies, and simulations or games that pose organizational or group quandaries or dilemmas. In all instances, the consequences of decisions made in these situations are considerably less serious than those made in situations where jobs and reputations are at stake.

Being that these shared experiences take place on "safe ground," they should increase your willingness to experiment. At the same time, they provide a guaranteed opportunity—since they take place on "territory" we have agreed to explore together—to try out deeper modes of observation that might lead you to refine your capacity for reflection and concept formation. The work we will do together, more than anything else, is meant to promote a kind of "hyperobservation" or "sophisticated noticing" on your part.

A persistent thread running through our joint learning is an understanding of how "real-world" quandaries are almost always reflected in the experiences we will share. These experiences may seem artificial, but in reality they are not; they are as real as those that occur in your workplace. The point here is that there is often as much, if not more, potential for solid learning from the "here and now" of a low-stakes, shared experience as there is from the more removed experiences—an understanding rarely exploited in academic and even corporate settings.

Finally, there are three major sequential (more or less) steps learners need to go through to analyze and use experience—"what," i.e., what happened within the boundaries of the experience; "so what," i.e., what interpretations can one legitimately draw from the experience or what are the general implications of the experience; and "now what," i.e., what should one do differently in more high-stakes contexts, such as the school, because of what was just learned.

This approach—avowedly experiential—contrasts starkly with the traditional scholastic approach, which is first, to present concepts, and then second, to invite learners to apply them to their work lives. While it risks some conceptual integrity, it has the potential to engage learners more deeply with ideas and help them make more direct connections between theory and practice.

ORGANIZATION OF THE BOOK

The aim of this introduction has been to offer a foundation of ideas for the exercises that follow in the next section. The exercises in Part II are organized into broad categories. There is a rationale for these categories

and a logic to the sequence in which the exercises are presented within each category. Users will be invited to heed this sequence in their own application of the exercises if they choose. If not, they can look through the list of exercises and select ones they believe will meet their needs for given occasions and purposes.

After the presentation of the exercises, there is a final section that presents several stories of the author's application of the exercises in real professional development contexts. It might make sense for readers to peruse this last section at the same time that they are reading about the exercises and selecting ones that seem to meet their needs. In the back of the book, there is a one-page matrix that slots the exercises according to purpose and topic, and lastly, there is a short list of references of major works on which I have drawn to compose the exercises.

The 30 exercises are organized under the following headings. The first is *Maps and Markers*. These exercises are intended to expand the mental landscape of participants—in terms of time, space, political reach, organizational presence. They invite participants to delve deeper into their own resources, assets, and reserves as professionals and to see how what they have to offer connects with what their colleagues have to offer. They are also encouraged to expand the boundaries that they consider as the appropriate domain for their work as professionals in the school—to recognize their responsibility for the entire enterprise, not just their specialized role in it. Finally, participants are asked to become more self-critical of their work as professionals, to practice critical reflection by themselves and with each other.

The second heading is *Multiplicity, Mutuality, and Meaning*. These exercises offer participants the opportunity to shape a collective intelligence and a collective will as professionals—to move from disparate and poorly coordinated perspectives and approaches toward greater common understanding, shared vision, coordinated strategy, and joint initiative. In this series of exercises, participants are invited to share their different perspectives as professionals and to attempt to craft the ties that bind them to each other. They are also asked to question basic operating assumptions. And finally, they are urged to sketch out common ground that can serve as the basis of joint effort.

The third heading is *Mission Maintenance and Momentum*. These exercises are meant to solidify common purpose and engender concerted action. Some encourage new arenas of inquiry and analysis, while others seek to guide agenda setting for purposeful deliberations. A couple of them are meant to promote increased political savvy on the part of school professionals. Others foster the attainment of momentum for change or the deflection of unhelpful distractions.

Within each of these sections, the exercises are arranged in rough order, from mildly demanding and relatively light to more demanding and relatively serious. Many of the exercises presented first in each of the sections would work well as starters for staff development sessions. Those presented at the end offer opportunity for sharpening key points or

solidifying important gains as development sessions are unfolding and intensifying.

FORMAT OF THE EXERCISES

Almost all the exercises can be accomplished in less than 45 minutes, including postactivity discussions. Suggested questions for reflection are offered in each exercise as guides for these discussions. There may, however, be instances in which vibrant and engaging discussions are provoked by an activity, and additional time should be set aside to address the issues raised.

Few props and little preparation are needed for these exercises. This is quite intentional, the aim being to ensure that the exercises can be easily and readily carried out, with minimal encumbrance. In most instances, the exercises are best done with a small group, about 12 to 20 participants. Many, however, can be done with much larger groups as long as these can be broken down into smaller subgroups of participants who have a work-place relationship.

Each exercise description also contains a short section that suggests where the exercise might best fit into a staff development continuum, what organizational learning principles it embodies, and when it might have the most positive impact on a group of learners. Finally, almost all the exercises can be carried out via face-to-face interaction among participants. However, many of these could be adapted for Web-based use. In addition, there are three exercises that are explicitly intended to be accomplished on the Web, as a supplement to face-to-face staff development sessions.

30 Reflective Exercises

Maps and Markers

Expanding the Mental Landscape



The first set of exercises invites participants in a staff development program to extend their mental boundaries—work toward attaining greater collective self-consciousness as professionals and engage in more directed self-criticism. They increase their familiarity with colleagues' assets and inclinations, gain a greater understanding of the past's impact and the future's potential, encompass a broader political landscape, and extend themselves mentally into the community surrounding the school. We begin with a few light exercises that afford participants an opportunity to introduce themselves in novel ways.

Exercise

1

Animal Attributes

PURPOSE AND RATIONALE ■

Done with openness, humor, and creativity, this exercise can increase participants' familiarity with each other's essential attributes, inclinations, and dispositions. The similes that this exercise generates can offer group members memorable reference points, especially insights into what they can expect from each other, as they seek to establish a common agenda. In essence, the exercise adds to a common knowledge base regarding participants' diversity and how it might be employed to accomplish group work.

CONTEXTUAL CUES ■

The exercise is best done at the outset of group work, when participants are just coming together for a development effort and they are optimistic, loose, creative, and ebullient.

DURATION ■

The exercise takes 15 minutes, including postactivity discussion.

OPTIMAL GROUP SIZE ■

Groups of 12 to 20 work best. A large group can do the exercise if subdivided into smaller groups.

PROPS ■

None needed.

■ PREPARATION

Openness and optimism on the part of participants.

■ PROCESS

Participants are first asked to individually jot down on sheets of paper the following two sentences: The first begins with "I" as subject, contains a verb like "work" or "teach," and continues with the phrase "much like a _____" (then the blank is filled in with a particular animal and that animal's characteristic action). An apt example for me is, "I teach much like a goat picks his way up a mountain track."

The second sentence is akin to the first but specifies a key aspect of working relationships. "I work with colleagues" or "I collaborate with other teachers" or "I interact with administrators" and continues with "much like a _____" (the blank is filled in with a particular animal and that animal's characteristic action). An example appropriate to me is, "I collaborate with colleagues much like a dog carefully sniffs a patch of grass."

When all participants have formulated their two sentences, they share them with the whole group. Then the group reflects openly for a few moments on what it has heard. Finally, the group engages in a brief discussion of what it has gleaned and what the implications are for participants' work together.

■ QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. How might we characterize our working group, given the "menagerie" we have just described?
2. What can be said about the different ways we approach important tasks?
3. What can be said about how well we might work together?
4. What do the characterizations say about our assets? Our liabilities?
5. To what extent do we exhibit the necessary ingredients to succeed—an ability to take risks, an inclination to deliberate carefully, perseverance, other important qualities?
6. Do our characterizations point to cautions worth heeding as we proceed in our work together?
7. How could this exercise be adapted for work with students?

Exercise 2

Ancestors

PURPOSE AND RATIONALE ■

This exercise increases participants' familiarity with each other's personal histories. The information gleaned can serve as a basis for greater understanding of the diversity of individual backgrounds in a group. It can also spark a healthy discussion of the nature of the times in which we live and the associated challenges participants face. The extent to which professionals perceive a common bond with each other, e.g., we are all immigrant children, is the extent to which they can begin to build a foundation for effective collaboration.

CONTEXTUAL CUES ■

The exercise is best done at the outset of group work when participants might benefit from additional information about each other, even if they think they know each other well. It is lighthearted, nonthreatening, and thus requires relatively little stretch by the participants. Yet it provides a useful backdrop to the substantive work ahead.

DURATION ■

The exercise takes about 15 minutes, including postactivity discussion.

OPTIMAL GROUP SIZE ■

Groups of 12 to 20 work best. Larger groups can do the exercise if subdivided into smaller groups.

PROPS ■

None needed.

■ PREPARATION

Just openness and optimism on the part of participants.

■ PROCESS

Each participant, at random, describes one or two of his or her more legendary ancestors—"legendary" within the participant's family, not necessarily within the broader community. The ancestors need only represent treasured family characteristics. Participants should be able to identify the time that the ancestor lived and describe a few notable activities for which the individual deserves recognition within the participant's family.

■ QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. What might we say in general about the references just made to our legendary ancestors—are there common threads that run through the short stories just told?
2. What kinds of stories might our children or our grandchildren tell about us, were they to do this exercise 50 years or so from now?
3. Will they tell similar stories or quite different ones? If the latter, what will the differences be? And what are the implications of these differences?
4. What do all our stories, taken together, say about the changing social conditions that we as educators confront?
5. Are there fit applications of this exercise in a classroom context—for example, a move toward oral histories in an upper elementary or middle school class?

Exercise

3

Pushpins

PURPOSE AND RATIONALE ■

The background information this exercise provides about participants will enhance their joint staff development efforts. Like other exercises in this book, this one helps participants efficiently document and assess the collective base of human resources they have to support the work they are about to undertake together in a school setting. Participants use their bodies as pushpins on a floor map to answer a couple of relevant questions. The answers, taken together, provide an initial demographic of who is in the room and how they got there.

CONTEXTUAL CUES ■

This exercise gets participants on their feet and invites them to move around and engage in informal conversation. It usually engenders enthusiasm, and occasionally sparks enlightenment. Since it can set a positive tone, it is probably best done as an opener. Clearly, the quality of the experience depends on the kinds of questions asked—more factual followed by more interpretive, less personal followed by more personal, past-oriented followed by future-oriented, and so forth. As these sorts of progressions develop, the experience becomes richer and more rewarding for the participants.

DURATION ■

The exercise takes about half an hour, including postactivity discussion.

OPTIMAL GROUP SIZE ■

The exercise can be accomplished with groups of 15 to 50, although the postactivity discussion may be more difficult to manage with larger groups.

■ PROPS

Markers of some sort, such as orange cones or chairs with colored paper attached to them, form the boundaries of a geographic area mapped out on an uncluttered part of the floor in the room where the participants are meeting. The "geography" represented can be a region of the world, the continental United States, a region of the United States, a particular state, or region of a state—whatever area is most appropriate to the backgrounds of the participants and the content of the questions posed.

■ PREPARATION

One of the participants crafts three questions before the group meets, questions participants can easily respond to by moving to a designated spot on the geographic area simulated on their meeting room floor. Questions should be designed to uncover key background facts, or even attitudes of participants. For example, where did you attend secondary school? Or alternatively, what place do you associate with true strength of character? They might also be about the origins or motivating forces behind decisions made by participants, such as, where were you when you knew for sure you wanted to become an educator? Aspirations of the participants are also fair game—such as identifying a place that would inspire the participant to become more skilled at her craft.

■ PROCESS

The session begins with all participants standing, loosely grouped on the "map" that has been created on the floor. The designated questioner asks her colleagues to respond to her first question by going to the spot on the floor that answers the question. When participants arrive at this spot, they look around at who else is close by and they engage in a short period of inquiry about where they are and why they are there. After the clusters have had a chance to discuss their location, the whole group pauses to give an opportunity to some or all of the participants to explain their positioning to the whole group.

The same process is used to respond to successive questions posed by the designated questioner. It is important to note that the questioner should also take time to respond to her own questions and participate equally with her colleagues.

■ QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. What do the data generated in this activity say about the sort of working group we are?

2. To what extent do we come from diverse backgrounds? Share common backgrounds?
3. To what extent do we have divergent attitudes? Share common attitudes?
4. To what extent do we have divergent aspirations? Share common aspirations?
5. What are the implications of what we have learned in this exercise for the development effort we are about to undertake together?
6. Are there any specific takeaways that will affect our ability to work together—to formulate and pursue common goals?
7. Might we see this exercise as an appropriate opener for some of our classes, especially in social studies?

Surprise Me

■ PURPOSE AND RATIONALE

This exercise brings to the surface assets that will be useful to participants as they engage in staff development whose purpose is to develop and pursue shared vision. Remarkably, people who have worked with each other for several years know less than they think they know about each other, in terms of the full range of background experiences and skills. In fact, people who have worked with each other for some duration tend to harbor more stereotypes than clear impressions based on fact. The aim here is to make participants' true skills and attributes—some learned in previous jobs, some gained through avocational pursuits—public. They could represent a bank of resources that would advance the work of the group.

■ CONTEXTUAL CUES

This exercise works best with participants who have a reasonable amount of working experience with each other. It can be done as an opener but is probably best done after a staff development initiative is under way. If there are surprises, their effect will be greater after the group has been at it for a couple of days. In fact, this exercise might work well as an opener on or about day three.

■ DURATION

The exercise takes about 20 minutes, including postactivity discussion.

■ OPTIMAL GROUP SIZE

To be effective, this exercise should be done with small groups of no more than 20. If a larger group has been assembled for staff development, it is possible to form multiple small groups to do the exercise and then have spokespeople for each smaller group express to the larger group the gist of the surprises uncovered.

PROPS ■

None needed.

PREPARATION ■

None needed, just an open mind and an exploratory bent.

PROCESS ■

Participants pair up and go to a space where they can have a brief conversation. The topic of the conversation should be the skills, abilities, talents, expertise, and passions that each person has—drawn from outside interests, previous jobs, university training—that might aid in the implementation of change. Participants are urged to think hard to come up with capacities that might even be a revelation for most of their colleagues. Art and design skills, writing and other communication abilities, promotional and organizational talents, experience in advertising—these and others are fit candidates.

After about 5 minutes of interchange on this topic, the pairs come together again as a whole group. Each person to whom this surprise talent was revealed introduces it to the group. When all the presentations have been made, the group discusses the sum total of the wealth of material that has been uncovered.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION ■

1. What can be said in summary about the special abilities just surveyed?
2. Which ones might be deployed in the work we envision doing together? Think hard here, as many participants tend to believe that capacities other than traditional professional ones might not be terribly useful, when in fact most of what it takes to succeed in a collective endeavor has little to do with occupational skills. A marketing knack, special expertise in an artistic medium, editorial skills—these might carry the day for a group effort of political-organizational dimensions.
3. Any thoughts about why some of this information is news to many in the room? Why hadn't we gathered this information before now?
4. Are there things we ought to be doing with new staff, to be sure to take advantage of special abilities like the ones we just identified?
5. Could this exercise produce positive results in a middle or high school class if the intent were to identify assets that students might use to support each other's learning?

E-xplore Assets

■ PURPOSE AND RATIONALE

This exercise provides advance preparation for participants in identifying and documenting the collective base of human resources they have to support their joint development work. It does this by taking advantage of Web-based technologies to ensure that the valuable face-to-face time participants have with each other will be used to advance their substantive agenda. In this exercise, participants respond to a prompt on a Web discussion board before their first formal development session. When the discussion board is full, responses are synthesized and become grist for analysis and reflection by the participants as they begin work with each other.

■ CONTEXTUAL CUES

The usefulness of this exercise depends on two stipulations—first, that the participants are relatively adept at engaging in a Web-based discussion, and second, that they will actually take the initiative to post on the Web discussion board in a timely fashion. If these two stipulations are not met, the exercise might be more frustrating than fulfilling. Done successfully, the exercise can provide the basis for mutual understanding and respect among participants, and thus should be done before formal professional development sessions get under way.

■ DURATION

The exercise requires about a half hour from each participant: 15 minutes to make an initial posting to the Web discussion board and 15 minutes to offer a synthesizing comment on others' postings.

■ OPTIMAL GROUP SIZE

Up to 25 participants can post to the discussion board. For large groups, additional discussion boards would need to be arranged.

PROPS ■

A designated Web site to which all participants have access. The site must include a discussion board. Blackboard.com and others like it will suffice.

PREPARATION ■

Participants should have some experience in using Web-based discussion boards. If they do not, then some orientation may be necessary. Usually one or more group members can serve as orienters/coaches for their colleagues. The very process of skill-building from within a group can foster more cooperative working relationships.

PROCESS ■

Before their first face-to-face development session, one participant agrees to serve as question poser. She formulates and posts a question on the Web discussion board regarding individual and group assets, to which all participants will respond within an agreed-upon time frame such as a week to 10 days. The general intent of the question should be as follows:

Beyond your capacities as a classroom teacher, counselor, or administrator, what ability, skill, or interest do you have that might be brought into play to advance the school's educational and social mission?

Within the time allowed, each participant posts a succinct response on the Web discussion board. All are encouraged to check the Web site frequently to view their colleagues' responses and see what common themes are emerging. After all participants have made their individual contributions, they are instructed to make a second posting whose intent is to synthesize the individual postings—to identify common themes and threads. Participants then review all the entries posted on the discussion board before their first face-to-face meeting.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION ■

(Incorporated into participants' first face-to-face development session)

1. What were the advantages of collecting information on each other's assets before we formally began our staff development effort? What were the disadvantages?
2. What, if anything, did we learn about our assets as a group?
3. Were there any surprises, either about individuals or the group as a whole?

4. To what extent do we now have a more thorough inventory of assets?
5. What additional information do we need about individual and group assets?
6. To what extent did this approach to inventorying assets advance the work we are about to undertake?
7. How might we best combine our face-to-face meetings with further Web discussions?
8. How can we best capitalize on our time together, which mostly involves synchronous discussion, and our time on the Web, which mostly involves written entries asynchronously posted?

Exercise 6

Instant History

PURPOSE AND RATIONALE ■

This exercise is meant to provide participants with an essential backdrop for their work together. Past is prologue. Thus, it is essential as participants set out to accomplish important development work with each other that they identify prominent features of their common past and seek to understand the implications for future efforts.

CONTEXTUAL CUES ■

Being that this exercise requires a bit of forethought on the part of participants, it's not a good choice for an opener. It also invites honest contributions by participants regarding important events that have affected the course of their school's history. Thus, the exercise is best done after a group has warmed to each other, is showing a degree of mutual trust, and is preparing to engage in critical inquiry that could lead to an expanded view of future possibilities.

DURATION ■

The exercise takes about half an hour, more if the group is large and has to break into smaller groups.

OPTIMAL GROUP SIZE ■

Groups can be quite large in toto. If more than 30, however, it would make sense to divide the larger group into smaller units. The larger group could then gather and compare the histories that the smaller groups have generated.

PROPS ■

Newsprint sheets with Magic Markers and masking tape for posting the sheets. Several sheets are posted side by side on a wall and a line is drawn

horizontally across all of them to be used as a time line. At the far left is a date denoting the establishment of the school, and at the far right is the current year.

■ PREPARATION

Participants need to identify ahead of time the markers, or key events, that they will denote on the horizontal line drawn on the newsprint sheets.

■ PROCESS

Participants gather as a whole group and are charged with placing on the horizontal line a marker and short description of at least one important event or development in the school's past. Preferably, it should be an event that participants have experienced firsthand, but it can also be one that they heard others discuss. When this task is completed, participants reconvene. For a few minutes, they review the chronology and seek clarification or elaboration, if necessary, regarding any of the posted events. A discussion then ensues regarding the annotated time line(s) that participants have developed.

■ QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. What have been the school's notable accomplishments?
2. Which have been the most significant in terms of fulfilling the mission of the school?
3. What have been the school's most notable challenges?
4. Which have been the most significant in terms of charting new directions for the school?
5. Which pieces of our past do we want to be sure to preserve as guideposts for our work together going forward?
6. Which pieces might we consider jettisoning to improve our overall effectiveness?
7. Could this exercise be usefully adapted for classroom use, with the purpose of reflecting on the work of a term or a whole year?

Bringing the Outside In

PURPOSE AND RATIONALE ■

This exercise encourages participants to attain a more philosophical stance on their joint work, to step back and reflect on what has developed among them, what it means, what the implications and impact are, and how best to join emerging concepts and assumptions with operant ones. Forward progress is almost never gained with uninterrupted intensity. Rather, it is dependent on strategic pauses, opportunities for slowing down, and occasionally stopping to consider where one is and what one's situation is and should be.

CONTEXTUAL CUES ■

Since this exercise is a "pause in the action," an invitation to reset one's compass bearings, it is best done after the staff development session has taken on some momentum, and perhaps some fundamental disagreements have surfaced within the group. The most propitious time is when participants could benefit from stepping back from intense interaction with each other.

DURATION ■

The exercise takes 20 to 30 minutes, including the postactivity discussion.

OPTIMAL GROUP SIZE ■

Optimal group size would be 12 to 20, although the exercise can be done with larger groups as well, understanding that the postactivity discussion may be more awkward as a result.

■ PROPS

None needed.

■ PREPARATION

None needed.

■ PROCESS

Having agreed to do so at a prior session, participants spend the first 10 minutes of their next staff development sessions dispersed outside their meeting room. They all agree to find a spot of solitude and reflection, preferably in the open air, where they can be alone and keep their own counsel for a few minutes before their next session formally begins. They agree to think about the work they have done together to this point and to ponder the work ahead.

When they come together in their meeting room, participants convene either as a whole group or first in groups of 3 to 4, and then as a whole group. They address together the questions for reflection below.

■ QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. Where did you go for your short period of solitude and reflection?
2. What prompted you to choose the spot you did?
3. What difference did this short interlude make in terms of your thinking about what we have done so far?
4. What difference did this short interlude make in terms of how you see the work ahead?
5. If there are benefits to making time for a few minutes of peace and solitude, then how can we ensure that this will be available on a continuing basis during our work together?
6. Are there classroom applications of this exercise, such as inviting students to reflect privately on an experience before writing a paper on it?

Best, Worst

PURPOSE AND RATIONALE ■

This exercise is designed to help participants understand how their colleagues address professional challenges and what some of their underlying values are. When a person frames a continuum by describing the extreme points on it, she is offering important insight into the territory that comprises her professional world. This exercise, while it tends to engender humorous interchange, enhances participants' understanding of similar and divergent professional assessments made by individual group members. It also suggests how different members set and apply standards to the populations they are serving.

CONTEXTUAL CUES ■

The exercise is best done after the members gain a degree of familiarity and after they have begun a professional development experience with each other. There is added meaning when listening to their colleagues' stories if they know something about them, if they have a context into which to place their judgments about best and worst.

DURATION ■

The exercise takes about 30 minutes, including postactivity discussion.

OPTIMAL GROUP SIZE ■

One or more groups of 12 to 20. The exercise could be done with a large number of participants if they were divided into smaller groups.

PROPS ■

None needed.

■ PREPARATION

None needed.

■ PROCESS

In random order, each participant in a group of 12 to 20 describes in less than 5 minutes two contrasting scenarios, a "best" and a "worst." Topics may vary, but two that seem to work quite well are

The best student I ever had and the worst student I ever had.

The best day I had on the job and the worst day I had on the job.

After all participants have had the floor, the group discusses the data just presented.

■ QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. What are some of the common threads that run through the descriptions just offered? Are there classic best and worst students, or best and worst scenarios?
2. What do these tales of the "extremes" in our professional lives say about us as professionals—about our professional standards, for example?
3. Whether humorous, touching, rewarding, frustrating—whatever their character—to what extent do the tales offer sustenance for us to persist in our efforts?
4. Alternatively, to what extent do they signal issues that warrant attention as we seek to do a better job on a daily basis?
5. What else can we learn from the data just presented?

Don't Surprise Me

PURPOSE AND RATIONALE ■

This exercise's purpose is to increase participants' confidence that the significant change effort in which they will be engaged together will not remove all the supports they count on to do their jobs, especially the support they might garner from their colleagues. Change is difficult, sometimes made more so by a fear that all the props that one has relied on for support and succor will be removed at the same time. It is important to identify some things one can be assured will remain the same though others will change.

CONTEXTUAL CUES ■

This exercise requires that the participants have raised the stakes with each other through their professional development initiative. Perhaps they have agreed to pursue certain changes in teaching and learning strategies or to establish a new charter with parents.

DURATION ■

The exercise takes about 30 minutes, including postactivity discussion.

OPTIMAL GROUP SIZE ■

Smaller groups are best, say, 12 to 20. It is possible to break down a large group into smaller groups, as long as all the members of the smaller groups share the same work context.

PROPS ■

None needed.

■ PREPARATION

None needed.

■ PROCESS

Participants break into groups of three and go to a space where they can have a brief, relatively private conversation. The topic of the conversation should be the elements of their work life that they absolutely do *not* want to change as other aspects are undergoing change. Identified elements can be fairly general and abstract, like a set of values or the character of important relationships. Or they can also be more professionally concrete, like planning time with particular colleagues, or they can be socially and psychologically compelling, like time to relieve job pressure through humorous interchanges.

Whatever represents a potential loss about which participants are apprehensive—these are the intended topics of these three-way conversations. After about 10 minutes of three-way conversations, the whole group reconvenes and one person from each small group presents the themes that emerged. After each group representative has had a chance to speak and hopefully several themes have been identified, a full-group discussion ensues along the lines of the questions for reflection below.

■ QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. What in general might be said about current practices we do not want to change?
2. What are the common threads among the practices cited?
4. Of the practices we do not want to change, which ones are in our control?
5. If not in our control, which practices might we be able to influence?
6. Which ones lie outside our control completely?
7. Of the practices in our control or within our sphere of influence, are we sure that not altering them represents a benefit to the students and parents we serve?
8. If not, are there some current practices whose adjustment we might have to endure while holding to others that are the core of our stability?

Exercise 10

Leadership Then, Now, Into the Future

PURPOSE AND RATIONALE ■

This exercise is meant to focus participants' attention on their past, present, and future modes of leadership by asking them to create metaphors for these evolving states. Metaphors magnetize; they draw together the differing perspectives of group members into a common bond. This exercise provides a ready visual flowchart of how the participants see themselves taking the collective lead on behalf of teaching and learning in their school. Increasing the focus of participants on how they lead—in the past, present, and future—helps them to discern a larger context for their work, a kind of Big Picture. The aim of professional development in general should be to expand participants' collective range and scope. This exercise offers a set of markers for that expansion.

CONTEXTUAL CUES ■

This exercise is not a starter but one that crystallizes ongoing effort. Thus, it is best done after participants have engaged with each other for a period of time, and it looks as if it would be important to solidify gains. It might also be a capstone of staff development efforts, a way to create a lasting impression of the common goals the group will pursue as a result of the development sessions.

DURATION ■

While the activity takes only 15 minutes, the discussion that develops after it can be considerably longer as participants summarize and talk about past, current, and anticipated modes of leadership.

■ OPTIMAL GROUP SIZE

The best group size for this exercise would be 12 to 35, although the post-activity discussion can become more cumbersome with groups of more than 25. For large groups, expert facilitation would be in order.

■ PROPS

Newsprint sheets—one for “Then,” one for “Now,” and one for “Into the Future”—enough Magic Markers for each participant, and masking tape.

■ PREPARATION

None needed.

■ PROCESS

A blank wall area is sectioned off, with three newsprint sheets posted side by side. One sheet is headed, “Then”; another, “Now”; and a third, “Into the Future.”

Using Magic Markers, participants write in large print on the appropriate newsprint sheets a list of metaphors for how they see their leadership in the school—first metaphors for their past leadership, then present, and finally into the future. Metaphors can be of any sort—musical and artistic, animalistic, mechanistic, just to cite few of the possibilities. For example, was the participant, for the most part, a soloist who now joins more regularly into chamber groups, with an eye to joining more of a unified orchestra in the future? Or was he more of a distant father figure who now serves as social worker, looking to a future where he might become a mediator of knowledge and a moral guide?

As the participants post their metaphors, one or two participants, who posted early, stand at the wall and make notes about metaphors that seem to convey the same or similar meaning. When all have finished, they sit or stand nearby and review the visual presentation in front of them.

■ QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. Which of the metaphors seems most on target, most compelling for where we have been, where we are, and where we intend to head as school leaders?
2. Which metaphors, or which cluster of metaphors, are ones that strike us as useful benchmarks as we move forward on the agenda that we have developed in these professional development sessions?

3. What relationship do we see between what our leadership mode has been, what it is at present, and how we intend to shape it?
4. Are our aspirations, as reflected in the most compelling metaphors, too high, too low, or about where they should be?
5. What does this array of metaphors say about the culture of this school? That is, what sorts of patterns or themes dominate the ways we characterize our leadership—past, present, and future?

*Multiplicity,
Mutuality, and Meaning*
Working Collaboratively



Participants in a staff development program work toward achieving the requisite common understanding that can lead to a transformative agenda for teaching and learning schoolwide or districtwide. They explore each other's professional views, examine the impact of the physical environment of the school on their educational agenda, and probe operating assumptions and underlying values that drive behavior in their workplace. They then start to sketch a joint sense of direction. We begin with a couple of exercises that afford participants the opportunity to probe each other's perspectives.

Dashing Dual Interview

■ PURPOSE AND RATIONALE

This exercise presents participants with useful information about each other's views, and at the same time promotes active listening. Like other exercises described in the previous section, this one helps participants to identify and document efficiently the collective base of human resources they have to support the development work they are undertaking together. The main thrust is that building shared vision within a staff begins with two of that staff engaging in meaningful conversation with each other. This exercise honors this essential building block of collaborative deliberation and analysis.

■ CONTEXTUAL CUES

This exercise is a good opener. Users might consider pairing it with one of the exercises described above in "Maps and Markers." While its purpose is more aligned with the identification of common ground, it also overlaps with the purpose of these earlier exercises, which is to expand the participants' scope and range as initiative-takers.

■ DURATION

The exercise requires about half an hour.

■ OPTIMAL GROUP SIZE

The optimal range is 12 to 24. It is possible to do the exercise with much larger groups as long as they can be subdivided into smaller groups whose members share a common work context.

PROPS ■

None needed.

PREPARATION ■

The willingness of one participant to frame a question that pairs of participants can use as a prompt for an interview that will last no more than 5 minutes.

PROCESS ■

As the group convenes for its first session, participants pair off, preferably with a colleague they know less well. If the group contains an odd number of participants, one of the pairs adopts a third member. Then the participant who agreed to frame a question in advance of the session poses it for her colleagues. One and only one question is posed. The question serves as a prompt for the pairs of participants to conduct a short mutual interview. It should be a thought-provoking question, one that will trigger hearty interchanges and produce useful information for the group as a whole.

Questions could be about expectations for the staff development effort, the goals of an anticipated change effort that might grow out of development efforts, or differing perspectives on a current topic of concern. Or the question could be more personal or philosophical, such as the perceived yield from participants' previous professional learning as individuals, major nonprofessional areas of expertise that each participant brings into the group, or views about a current policy that might have a significant impact on the school.

After the question has been posed and any clarifying questions from participants are answered, the pairs take turns interviewing each other, ensuring that each person in the pair is given equal airtime. *No notes should be taken during the interviews, only careful listening.* When 5 minutes are up, the whole group reconvenes. In random order, not necessarily one member of a pair followed by the other, participants paraphrase the gist of what they have gathered from the colleague they interviewed. After all participants have "introduced" the views of their colleagues, a short whole-group discussion ensues.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION ■

1. What common threads can we identify from the individual presentations just made?
2. What were a few of the unique findings that we might want to keep in mind as we proceed with our development effort?

3. What, if anything, did we learn about our assets, our views, or our special capacities as a group?
4. To what extent did this approach to interviewing each other aid in the development of listening skills?
5. What can we take away from this activity in terms of both active listening and the diverse resource base that this group represents?
6. What are the potential classroom applications of this exercise, were the teacher to pose this same question for students?

Exercise 12

E-xplore Perspectives

PURPOSE AND RATIONALE ■

This exercise is designed to promote understanding and respect among participants for the differing perspectives that each brings to the development work in which they are involved. It taps the advantages of Web-based technologies, using them to quickly and efficiently compile participants' views without the participants having to come together in the same space at the same time. In effect, this exercise serves the purpose of ensuring that a group advances its cause between formal, face-to-face sessions.

CONTEXTUAL CUES ■

This exercise has the potential to advance group efforts quite dramatically and quickly. But all participants have to be willing to "play," and the participant with the responsibility to synthesize all her colleagues' written contributions has to be adept at synthesis. Rarely would all the necessary capacities and inclinations to ensure the success of this exercise be in place at the outset of participants' work with each other. Thus, the exercise should be done when the group feels ready to undertake it and believes that it will have the intended effect.

DURATION ■

The exercise requires about half an hour from each participant and another hour from the one participant who agrees to synthesize colleagues' Web contributions and post them on the discussion board.

OPTIMAL GROUP SIZE ■

No more than 25. Larger groups can be subdivided into smaller working groups of 12 to 25.

■ PROPS

A designated Web site to which all participants have access. The site must include a discussion board. Blackboard.com and others like it will suffice.

■ PREPARATION

Participants need the basic skills required to access and use Web discussion boards, and they have to be willing to post their contributions to the Web discussion in a timely fashion.

■ PROCESS

At one of their face-to-face development sessions, participants agree upon a set of questions—no more than three—to be posted on the Web for all participants to respond to within an agreed-upon time frame. A likely time frame is the period between two of the group's face-to-face meetings.

Let's say, for example, that the group has agreed to work together on a new approach to school-parent communication and to undertake a solid initiative in this area in the coming year. Each participant might be asked to respond to the following sorts of questions that will be posted on the Web discussion board:

- What assumptions underlie our present approach to school-parent communication?
- How might our present strategy concerning school-parent communication shift as we go forward?
- What one new aspect or element might we try in this coming year with regard to school-parent communication?

Note that the above sequence of questions asks participants to probe the underlying bases for the status quo, then to suggest possible strategic shifts, and finally to make one concrete suggestion that fits within an altered strategy. This is a logical sequence that can be applied to almost any topic participants are working on in their development sessions.

Within the designated period for Web-based discussion, each participant posts responses to the three questions. All are encouraged to check the site frequently to see how responses are shaping up and what common themes are emerging. The participant who has agreed beforehand to cluster the responses according to dominant themes and key areas of agreement and disagreement then completes this task and posts her summary to the Web discussion board. At its next development session, the group discusses the experience and the yield from it.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. What were the advantages of collecting our perspectives and our suggested strategies and initiatives through this new approach? What were the disadvantages?
2. To what extent did this approach allow for a full airing of all views?
3. Were the expressed views more thoughtfully presented by using this format?
4. To what extent did the written synthesis and summary advance the work we are doing together?
5. What is the actual yield from our Web discussion?
6. How should we apply that yield to our future work?
7. If we were to do this exercise again, how might we do a better job the next time?
8. How might we best combine our face-to-face meetings with our Web discussions as we go forward?
9. How can we best capitalize on our time together, which mostly involves synchronous oral interaction, and our time on the Web, which mostly involves written contributions asynchronously delivered?
10. What are a few of the applications of this exercise that some of us have used already in the classroom? What are a few additional ones that our doing this exercise has prompted us to think of?

Snapshots

■ PURPOSE AND RATIONALE

This exercise offers an intriguing way for all participants to gain an appreciation of the differing perspectives that their colleagues bring to their collective development work. It takes literally the notion that what participants see is what will dictate to a great extent how they approach their joint efforts. If effective group action requires careful noticing by group members of the way their colleagues see things, then this exercise provides an important baseline that should not be ignored.

■ CONTEXTUAL CUES

The exercise can be done at any point in a staff development progression. It is most fruitfully done, however, after participants have developed enough trust and mutual respect that they can be candid and open with each other. Another reason for deferring this exercise until later in a group's work is that issues relating to physical environment are best considered after social/educational concerns are aired and addressed.

■ DURATION

The exercise takes about 45 minutes of participants' meeting time to view snapshots and engage in a reflective discussion. To make this meeting time useful, participants must spend about half an hour beforehand capturing on film the aspects of their physical work environment that they believe deserve the attention of their colleagues.

■ OPTIMAL GROUP SIZE

A group of 12 to 25 is optimal. Larger groups can be subdivided into smaller groups as long as the smaller groups share the same work context.

PROPS ■

A camera for each participant or pair of participants. A disposable camera will serve the purpose if other forms are not available. Digital cameras, if available, best facilitate the process because time for developing photos is not required.

PREPARATION ■

Participants need not have photography experience, just a willingness to identify objects and subjects and snap pictures of them. In addition, participants need to allocate the time required to take about 10 photos each and have them developed.

PROCESS ■

With their disposable or digital cameras, participants capture on film about 10 shots of their physical work environment that they believe have important symbolic value, i.e., carry a message worth reporting to their colleagues concerning the place where they teach and students learn. What participants choose to shoot is totally up to them. It could be signage, special postings, well-ordered and well-presented spaces, disordered and poorly presented spaces—whatever participants find to be meaningful. Participants should be careful to respect the privacy of fellow staff members and of students as they take these pictures.

When all photographs are ready for presentation, participants mount them "gallery style" in the room where they are gathering for their staff development session. After all participants have had ample time to view the photographs and mull over their meaning, they form into groups of three and address the following questions. When the small groups have concluded their discussions, they present their findings to the whole group. A short discussion then ensues among the whole group in an attempt to capture the main ideas from the small-group discussions.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION ■

1. What images most captured your attention, because they brought to mind positive aspects of what happens in the school? Or, by contrast, negative aspects?
2. What were some of the dominant themes that emerged from the array of photographs displayed?
3. What kind of visual presentation does our school make, especially as one considers the impact of the physical setting on teaching and learning?

4. What in sum are the challenges facing us as we seek to establish a more positive learning environment, understanding that physical environment is one critical baseline for the development work we will be doing in the weeks (or months) ahead?
5. What are a few of the classroom applications we might envision for an exercise like this?

Exercise

14

Rotating Pencils

PURPOSE AND RATIONALE ■

The "Rotating Pencils" exercise prompts participants to reflect on potential changes in their perspective as a result of their joint staff development experience. As humans, we anticipate and experience change not only with our minds but with our bodies as well. This simple exercise grabs the attention of participants because it requires that they perform an action with their arms, view it with their eyes, and then analyze its implications with their minds. Thus, they make a tangible investment in struggling with the dynamics of change. This progression is an alternative to participants struggling with change as a set of ideas inside their heads only.

CONTEXTUAL CUES ■

This exercise is clearly an opener, maybe one of the first few that a group does in its first staff development session. When completed, it may seem purely incidental, yet it can subtly provide a more accepting context in which to discuss and embrace change.

DURATION ■

The exercise takes about 15 to 20 minutes, including a brief postactivity discussion.

OPTIMAL GROUP SIZE ■

Any size group will work, but there should be at least 15 to form a minimum critical mass of participants. Smaller groups—in the range of 15 to 25—allow for a richer postactivity discussion.

PROPS ■

One writing instrument per participant.

■ PREPARATION

None needed.

■ PROCESS

Seated or standing and arrayed in a circle or rows, participants take a pen or pencil in hand, and pointing it toward the ceiling, they raise it high above their heads and look up at it. At a signal from a designated colleague standing in front of them, all participants, in concert, begin rotating the pen or pencil clockwise. Again, at the direction of a colleague, participants slowly lower the pen or pencil without moving the rest of their body, keeping it pointed toward the ceiling and rotating it in the same direction as they did above their heads. After the participants have brought their pencil or pen *below eye level*, the colleague in front asks, "In what direction is the pen or pencil rotating?"

As confusion subsides and a few skeptical participants retry the exercise of rotating the pencil first above and then below eye level, the outcome starts to become clear to most or all. Where the object had been rotating clockwise above eye level, it is now rotating counterclockwise below eye level. Discussion ensues as to what happened and what the implications are.

■ QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. What is going on here? You didn't alter the direction of rotation, yet there was a shift from one direction to its opposite.
2. Okay, so there was no shift in the objective aspects of the pencil's movement, yet there was a 100 percent shift in the way we viewed this movement. Explain how this could be the case.
3. Are there examples from your experience that parallel what happened here?
4. What is the connection between the activity we just did and the situation in which we find ourselves in our school and community?
5. Can we envision possible ways our perspectives might change through the experience we are about to have together?
6. Changing perspectives requires reframing. What sorts of reframing should we expect to do in the weeks or months ahead as we seek to capitalize on our joint staff development efforts?
7. Under what circumstances would it make sense to do this exercise with students?

Exercise 15

Listening for Assumptions

PURPOSE AND RATIONALE ■

This exercise assists participants in honing their listening skills and enhancing their ability to uncover operating assumptions that affect behavior in their workplace.

Effective listening is extraordinarily hard to do, yet it is the skill most integral to a group's ability to shape common meaning. And common meaning is essential for effective teamwork. Thus, an exercise that sharpens listening skills is instrumental to improving overall staff performance.

Equally important is the ability of staff to uncover the main assumptions under which they are operating. Only by identifying assumptions, holding them up to scrutiny, and deciding whether they should be sustained or altered can a group of professionals set appropriate direction for its efforts.

CONTEXTUAL CUES ■

This is a demanding exercise that requires concentration and acuity from all participants. It should not be done as an opener to staff development, but rather as a midsentence "punctuation mark" after the group is well into making its professional development "statement." In effect, this exercise is a window on or a reprise of work that has already begun, an opportunity to bring ideas together and move forward, a gauge of how deeply participants are listening to each other.

DURATION ■

This exercise can take up to an hour, including the postactivity discussion.

■ OPTIMAL GROUP SIZE

Smaller groups are better than larger groups for this exercise, because of its density and compactness. A group of 12 to 20 is ideal.

■ PROPS

A statement by one of the participants, anyone but the titular school leader, on the aims of the development sessions the participants have undertaken together. An easel, newsprint sheets, and Magic Markers to record take-aways from this exercise.

■ PREPARATION

Participants should read an article, such as one by Edgar Schein of MIT's Sloan School or Seymour Sarason of Yale University, on the power of operating assumptions or cultural norms to drive behavior in organizations.

■ PROCESS

One of the participants agrees beforehand to prepare a short oral presentation on the aims of the group's ongoing staff development sessions. The presentation should be spoken, not read, short and crisp—no more than several sentences or a couple of minutes' worth. Participants then break into groups of three to discuss briefly both what the presenter has said and what the underlying assumptions of the presenter are concerning teaching, learning, and staff collaboration to improve the quality of both. At this point, the groups should not write anything down on paper.

The whole group then reconvenes and listens, one at a time, to the small groups' paraphrasing of what the presenter has said about aims and the presenter's assumptions about teaching, learning, and staff collaboration. Nothing should be written down. Following these oral presentations, the whole group wrestles briefly with the matter of what was said and what the main underlying assumptions of the presenter are.

Now one of the participants renders these assumptions on newsprint sheets. The group does not seek to achieve consensus on the wording as if this were a finished product. Rather, it agrees to view it as a draft, a work in progress, which will be reconsidered, adjusted, and expanded as the group moves forward with its work.

■ QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. On a scale of 1 to 10, 1 being low and 10 being high, how would each of the small groups rate themselves on the extent to which they were

able to capture the aim the presenter articulated? (The presenter's assessment can come into play here, but only after the groups have rated themselves.)

2. On the same scale of 1 to 10, how would the whole group rate itself on the extent to which it was able to capture the aim the presenter articulated? (Again, the presenter's assessment can come into play here, but only after the groups rate themselves.)
3. What do these self-assessments lead us to conclude with regard to our capacity for effective listening?
4. How well did the small groups accomplish the task as given—to uncover and distill underlying assumptions?
5. What key assumptions were identified?
6. How did our inquiry into underlying assumptions affect our understanding of aims, both as articulated by the presenter and understood by us?
7. What did we learn about each other's perspectives from having to do this task?
8. To what extent does uncovering assumptions advance our development as professionals? That is, what are the takeaways from this exercise?

Exercise 16

Fruits of Silence

■ PURPOSE AND RATIONALE

The "Fruits of Silence" exercise encourages participants to become more reflective about their collective efforts than might have been the case otherwise. One of the by-products of civilization as we know it is a penchant to fill our every living moment with distracting sound—from idle chatter to raucous music to the roar of automobile engines. Offering professionals the gift of silence is refreshing, even startling. Silence promotes reflection. Reflection nurtures creativity. Creativity breeds inspiration. And inspiration is essential for professional development that supports organizational learning.

■ CONTEXTUAL CUES

This exercise can be done at any point in a professional development program. The key is to choose a moment when it is likely to be most welcome, because it will provide a touch of refreshment and renewal.

■ DURATION

The exercise consumes about half an hour, including the postactivity discussion.

■ OPTIMAL GROUP SIZE

Normally small, say, 12 to 20. Larger groups should be divided into smaller ones, especially to facilitate the brief discussion after the activity. It would nonetheless be challenging, and perhaps rewarding, to attempt this exercise with an extremely large group. It could be riveting for the individuals involved to be part of a large group that remained silent for a sustained period.

PROPS ■

None needed.

PREPARATION ■

A short inspirational reading whose message is related, even if indirectly, to the staff development effort that is about to begin or is under way.

PROCESS ■

One of the participants agrees beforehand to select a short reading to kick off a period of sustained silence. A myriad of possibilities exists. I have found selected verses of the *Tao te Ching*, for example (translated by Stephen Mitchell), to be quite provocative of deep thought.

The group assembles and sits on chairs in an open space or on the floor. The self-selected participant offers a brief reading, and the group remains silent for a sustained period, say, about 5 minutes. The duration should be long enough for thoughts and feelings to germinate and jell, maybe even long enough for a few participants to become slightly restless. At the end of the agreed period of silence, the group discusses briefly the yield of their reverie and the implications of the self-imposed silence on their work together.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION ■

1. What thoughts came up during this period of silence?
2. Are there any common threads that run through the thoughts cited?
3. What did you "hear" during the period of silence?
4. What are the implications of what was heard during the silence, regarding patterns or aspects of listening?
5. What impact or effect did this period of silence have on us, individually and as a group?
6. What are the implications of the experience we just had for our staff development work together?
7. Would it be possible to do this exercise with a class, and if so, under what circumstances and to what effect?

Exercise 17

See

■ PURPOSE AND RATIONALE

This exercise is meant to offer participants a clear sense of the variety of interpretations that abound in the room when they are confronted with a single visual image. A staff is a collection of individuals who frame their professional worlds in quite different ways. While this is an obvious reality, it is nonetheless useful for participants to experience and discuss object lessons that demonstrate one of the most significant obstacles they will be attempting to overcome—different people seeing the same thing quite differently.

Schools present particular challenges in this regard because teachers, the main service providers, are afforded relatively few opportunities to review and reconcile key philosophical and practical differences among themselves as professionals.

■ CONTEXTUAL CUES

The exercise can be done at any time in a sequence of staff development sessions—at the beginning or somewhere in the middle. Since the differences that surface here relate to a visual depiction that is not integral to their real work together, participants can be casual about the effects of this exercise.

■ DURATION

The exercise requires about half an hour, including postactivity discussion.

■ OPTIMAL GROUP SIZE

Optimal size is 20 or more. It is possible to do the exercise with quite large groups.

PROPS ■

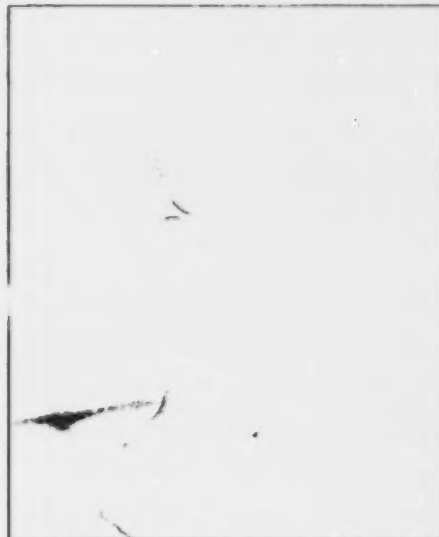
The object as depicted below, and sheets of blank paper for participants to write on.

PREPARATION ■

None needed.

PROCESS ■

Participants separately write on a sheet of paper what they believe the visual captured below to be.



Then the whole group breaks into small groups of 3 to 4. In the small groups, participants discuss their conclusions, both differing and similar. The whole group reconvenes to hear the sum total of the multiple individual interpretations and the drift of the small-group discussions that took place in their wake.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION ■

1. We all know that individuals see things differently. To what extent were there quite different interpretations of the visual image? To what extent were there quite similar interpretations?
2. What are the implications of this diversity in visual perception for our work together?

3. As we undertake this joint work, how can we make our different interpretations more transparent to each other?
4. In the final analysis, how can we manage our different ways of seeing to produce a positive rather than a negative effect, in terms of what we are trying to achieve together?
5. Can we identify a few of the more useful applications of this exercise for use in classrooms?

Exercise 18

Patchwork Perspectives

PURPOSE AND RATIONALE ■

This exercise helps participants understand the perspectives of all in the room regarding a topic of controversy that has arisen within the context of the development work the group has undertaken together. The exercise allows all voices to be heard on an issue that represents a potential stumbling block to group progress, and invites participants to review the landscape of diverse perspectives and assess the extent to which the establishment of common ground is possible.

CONTEXTUAL CUES ■

This exercise is clearly not an opener. It should be done only in a group where participants have developed a level of mutual trust and respect, have solid deliberation skills, and seem to have the will to perceive and build on common ground. In other words, participants should use this exercise with caution, aware of the possibility that divisions could be exacerbated rather than lessened through its application.

DURATION ■

The exercise takes about half an hour, including postactivity discussion.

OPTIMAL GROUP SIZE ■

A group of 12 to 20 is best. If attempted in a larger group, the smaller groups that are formed will need to have in common a matter of controversy that relates specifically to group members' work with each other.

■ PROPS

An easel with newsprint sheets and Magic Markers.

■ PREPARATION

Identification of a topic on which participants' opinions differ, important enough for their work together that all voices ought to be heard on it.

■ PROCESS

Participants contribute one sentence, and one sentence only, that frames their perspective on the topic of controversy with which the group is dealing. As each participant voices a single sentence, the others listen carefully and wait until the sentence is complete. One of the participants takes on the role of capturing on newsprint sheets the essence of each perspective offered. After everyone has had a turn, the group reviews the multiple perspectives and attempts to cluster similar ones. Clustering, however, should not blur points of view that are starkly different.

■ QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. Is there a dominant perspective on the issue we have identified for treatment here?
2. If not one, then how many different perspectives do we have among us?
3. Are any of these perspectives serious candidates for a potential compromise position that all could live with?
4. Which different perspectives warrant our attention and further discussion, not necessarily now but at a subsequent session?
5. Which if any of the voiced perspectives represent "showstoppers"—issues that need resolution for us to make progress on what we seek to accomplish through our development work together?
6. How can we capitalize on the diverse views in the room and ensure that we maintain positive rather than negative energy as we move forward?
7. Can we envision doing this exercise with students, either in a classroom setting, or even in a counseling session whose focus is conflict resolution?

Exercise 19

Stakes

PURPOSE AND RATIONALE ■

This exercise seeks to illuminate different value sets held by participants so that all can reflect on emphases that are shared and those that are not. That which school professionals value forms the basis of what they will do in their schools, both individually and collectively. Shared values can form a strong foundation for collective effort. Clarity about differences in values can also help a group understand how much and what form of collective effort is possible.

CONTEXTUAL CUES ■

This exercise is not meant to be an opener. Rather, it is best done when the staff development sessions are under way and it would make sense for the group to engage in an inventory of values. Group leaders should carefully consider appropriate timing, seeking a juncture when a self-assessment of values is likely to unify rather than divide the group.

DURATION ■

The exercise takes about half an hour, including postactivity discussion.

OPTIMAL GROUP SIZE ■

A group of 12 to 20 is best. Larger groups can be easily divided into smaller ones to do this exercise.

PROPS ■

Deck of playing cards and easel with newsprint sheets and Magic Markers.

■ PREPARATION

None needed.

■ PROCESS

Participants break into four small groups of 3 to 5 each. In the activity that follows, each group represents a different school site that has certain strengths and certain weaknesses as represented by the hand they are dealt. One participant shuffles the playing cards and deals out a hand of 13 cards to each of the small groups (school sites). All four hands are placed face up so that everyone in the room can see their composition. For purposes of the activity,

- Clubs = Intellectual Mastery
- Spades = Athletic Prowess
- Diamonds = Artistic and Creative Capacity
- Hearts = Social and Personal Well-Being

It is, of course, possible to identify other values for the different suits. Another set might be

- Clubs = Literacy Focus
- Spades = Environmental Emphasis
- Diamonds = Additional Classroom Resources
- Hearts = Community Service Orientation

Regardless of the values chosen, the same hierarchy applies here as in most card games—aces and face cards have higher value than 2s and 3s. With this in mind, the small groups assess the strength of their hands and discuss what mix of capacities they might like to have, as opposed to the mix they have been dealt. They then engage the other three groups in a process of open negotiation to see if they can make trades that will strengthen their hands. Small groups can trade up to 7 cards to achieve their aims, and it is not necessary to make card-for-card trades. It is possible to trade 1 ace, for example, for 3 to 4 cards of less value. After a short strategizing and trading period—about 10 minutes—the whole group reconvenes to review the final hands of the four schools.

■ QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. What were the perceived strengths and weaknesses in the hands that the small groups were initially dealt?
2. What goals were the small groups attempting to achieve by making trades?

3. To what extent did the small groups achieve their goals? Why was this the case?
4. What do we see as shared values across the four school sites?
5. What differences do we perceive in values across the sites?
6. What are the implications of these similar and different value sets for the work we are about to begin with each other?
7. Are there specific applications of what we have learned here about the mix of values that exists within the school staff?
8. How might this exercise be carried out in a classroom context or in a counseling session whose focus is conflict resolution?

Vision Sketch

■ PURPOSE AND RATIONALE

This exercise provides participants with ready access to the essential ingredients of a possible shared vision. A school's success with students relates directly to the ability of its staff to develop a shared vision for teaching and learning. In a short period, this activity advances this essential component of joint development work.

■ CONTEXTUAL CUES

Since this exercise tends to bond participants to particular visualizations of ideas, it really can be done at any time that shared visioning would seem to make sense for the group or groups.

■ DURATION

The exercise takes about half an hour, including postactivity discussion.

■ OPTIMAL GROUP SIZE

Optimal group size is 12 to 20. The exercise can be done in larger groups as long as the smaller groups they break into share a common interest.

■ PROPS

Easels with newsprint sheets and Magic Markers.

■ PREPARATION

Prior to the staff development session, a small group of participants—no more than 3 or 4—convenes for a short meeting and selects *one word or phrase* from the school's accepted vision or mission statement. The chosen

word or phrase should be one that beckons for further definition or elaboration, one that the small group believes will be enriched through a brief visualization process.

PROCESS ■

Participants break into small groups of 3 to 4. Each group brainstorms for a couple of minutes to generate ideas for its sketch. The small groups then compose a sketch that they feel interprets the selected word or phrase in its most ideal form. When all the groups have completed their sketches, the whole group reconvenes to view them and reflect briefly on their meaning and implications.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION ■

1. As we look at the sketches, what are the common threads, themes, or ideas that run through them?
2. What are a few of the distinctive or unique interpretations that appear in the sketches?
3. To what extent do the sketches, taken together, add meaning to the word or phrase we have chosen to define or elaborate upon?
4. What more should be done to build on the formulation begun with these sketches?
5. How can we use this initial work to build common understanding of and commitment to our essential mission/vision as it is developing from our work together?

Mission Maintenance and Momentum

Moving to Action



Participants in a staff development program advance a common agenda for teaching and learning in all quarters—inside the school and outside in the broader community—for student achievement and social justice. They experience the importance of first moves in effective interventions, calibrate expectations, and inform their common purpose with outside perspectives. They also fine-tune their political sensors and model the mutual commitment and positive interaction that will be necessary for success.

Exercise 21

Begin, Begin, Begin

■ PURPOSE AND RATIONALE

This exercise encourages participants to reflect on the critical importance of the way they initiate their development work with each other. A frequently repeated axiom is that the full impact of an experience is signaled in the first blush of that experience. Regarding staff development experiences, this is particularly true: What happens at the outset sets the tone for what follows. Through this exercise, professionals are able to feel and understand the full impact of this axiom.

■ CONTEXTUAL CUES

The exercise is an opener. Because it is a different way of beginning a meeting, it has the potential to signal to participants that the content of the upcoming sessions will be different. The exercise also promotes critical thinking without being threatening in any way.

■ DURATION

The exercise itself takes about half an hour; the postactivity discussion can consume an equal amount of time.

■ OPTIMAL GROUP SIZE

A group of 12 to 50 is best, although the postactivity discussion is more difficult with groups larger than 20.

■ PROPS

None needed.

PREPARATION ■

Before the first session, three participants (preferably volunteers) are identified as session openers. One agrees to open the session in a directive, goal-oriented manner, standing in front of the group, and, with newsprint sheets as props, setting out clear objectives for the session and outlining a fairly detailed agenda. A second will open the session in a nondirective, inclusive manner, gathering the participants in a circle, questioning group members about their intent and expectations, and helping the group shape a commonly agreed-upon set of directions for their time together. A third will open the session in a contemplative, spiritual vein, perhaps asking participants to sit on the floor in a circle and beckoning their attention with an inspirational reading, followed by free-flowing dialogue that has no firm conclusion or direction.

Openings should be no more than 3 to 4 minutes. The three meeting openers should feel free to use whatever creative arrangements or props that might add to their approach, yet they should not feel compelled to overdo it either.

PROCESS ■

The session begins with the first opener, then begins again with the second, then begins once again with the third. This whole process should take no more than 15 minutes total, at which point a short discussion ensues.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION ■

1. Which of the three meeting openers managed to capture and hold our attention?
2. Which aspects of particular openers were the most captivating?
3. Which had the most holding power?
4. Overall, what were the advantages and disadvantages of each meeting opener?
5. Which assets or dimensions, drawn from the three, should be incorporated into the staff development experience we are to share?
6. How can we ensure that these assets or dimensions, as identified, become integral to our work together as it unfolds?
7. What are the implications of what we have learned from these different beginnings for what teachers do in their classrooms or administrators do in their staff meetings?

Exercise 22

Modest Expectations

■ PURPOSE AND RATIONALE

This exercise helps participants establish a framework of mutual expectations for the work they are about to do together. One of the greatest deterrents to effective group work is the existence of disparate expectations among group members. These expectations can be the basis for needless conflict after the group is well into its task and the work has become intense. So it is essential at the outset of collaborative work to establish a framework of mutual expectations that will guide the work of the group as it unfolds.

■ CONTEXTUAL CUES

This exercise is an opener and is best done at the outset of group work. It engages participants in that work by honoring their views about overall aims and taking into account their concerns about how participants should treat each other throughout.

■ DURATION

The exercise takes about half an hour, including postactivity discussion.

■ OPTIMAL GROUP SIZE

A group size of 12 to 20 is optimal. Larger groups can accomplish the exercise if first divided into smaller groups for the expectation-setting phase. The large group then reconvenes for the purpose of ironing out differences and establishing a common framework.

■ PROPS

Post-it notes and an easel with newsprint sheets and Magic Markers.

PREPARATION ■

None needed.

PROCESS ■

All participants take a couple of Post-it notes. On the notes, they express their expectations (one expectation per note) regarding the work the group is about to undertake. The expectations can be substantive, e.g., "learn more about whole-language instruction," or "apply the material learned to my teaching this year." Or they can be procedural, e.g., "when one of us speaks, no one interrupts until that person has completed her thought," or "all participants respect the right of their colleagues to call 'time-out' to determine whether the group is on track."

As notes are completed, they are posted on a wall—substantive to the left, procedural to the right. Participants linger at the wall to read the emerging collection of expectations. Several participants take the lead in organizing the notes into clusters under topical headings as they are being posted. Those that do not fit under headings or are in disagreement with the prevailing body of thought are set off to the side. When all the notes have been organized into a rough framework, one of the participants explains the framework and reads all the notes under each topical heading, also indicating ideas that are at variance.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION ■

1. What sorts of expectations do we share as a group?
2. Are there areas of major disagreement that we should discuss later and seek to reach agreement on before moving forward with our work?
3. Now that we are viewing the sum total of our collective thoughts about legitimate expectations, are there whole areas that we have overlooked?
4. What should we do with this framework that we have just created, e.g., assume that we will be able to keep these guidelines in mind as we pursue our work together, or render them on newsprint and keep them visible as constant reminders?
5. What are the applications of this exercise for our staff meetings?
6. What are the applications of this exercise for classrooms, clubs, and sports teams?
7. To what extent would the yield from this exercise improve student performance in these venues?

Informed Purpose

■ PURPOSE AND RATIONALE

This exercise helps participants enrich the sense of purpose that underlies their joint staff development work. A sense of common purpose is what drives collaborative work. This exercise promotes the allocation of participants' time and resources to the development of a clear and well-informed purpose for the important work they have undertaken together on behalf of improved teaching and learning in the school.

■ CONTEXTUAL CUES

This exercise is best done after participants have worked together long enough to articulate and render a draft purpose for their work together.

■ DURATION

The exercise takes about half an hour, including postactivity discussion.

■ OPTIMAL GROUP SIZE

A group of 12 to 20 works best. Larger groups should be subdivided into smaller groups as long as members of the smaller groups work together.

■ PROPS

An easel with newsprint sheets and Magic Markers.

■ PREPARATION

Participants need to have created a draft statement of purpose for the staff development effort in which they are about to engage or on which they

have embarked. This statement should be directed at improving the quality of teaching and learning in the school.

PROCESS ■

All participants agree to contact a colleague from another school, a mentor from a previous job, or a professor with whom they have worked at a university. Their mission is to ask this person for his or her perspective on the extent to which the stated purpose, if fulfilled, will improve the school's ability to meet the needs of students. If direct contact with an outside party isn't possible, participants surf the Web or browse the print resources in a library or a local bookstore. In any event, all agree to come prepared at their next staff development session to report on what they have learned from outside sources with regard to the asserted purpose of their work together.

Upon arrival at their first face-to-face meeting, participants briefly write out what they have learned on newsprint sheets and post them about the room for all to see. After all have had a chance to review the multiple offerings, small groups of 3 or 4 participants form to discuss them. The goal of these small-group discussions is to synthesize the offerings and prepare a recommendation on the draft purpose. Should it stay as is or be adjusted in some way? If the latter, how should it be adjusted? After about 10 minutes of small-group discussion, the whole group reconvenes, reviews the results of the small-group work, and formulates a whole-group reaction to the stated purpose.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION ■

1. What was the result of this inquiry into our draft purpose?
2. To what extent has our thinking about what we are doing here been reaffirmed by this inquiry?
3. To what extent has our thinking about what we are doing here been altered by this inquiry?
4. To what extent has our thinking about what we are doing here been enriched by this inquiry?
5. Which outside sources yielded the most useful material?
6. Which methods of inquiry yielded the most useful material?
7. What are the implications of this process for our work as we go forward?
8. Should we repeat this process periodically at key junctures of our work, for example, apply it not only to our guiding purpose but to our emerging strategies?

Beginning at the End

■ PURPOSE AND RATIONALE

This exercise helps participants develop a shared view of the outcomes of their work together, even as that work is just getting under way. Every staff development session should begin with a clearly stated and commonly held view of the intended outcomes for that session. This way, the session is much more likely to be rewarding and successful for all participants. "Beginning at the end" simply increases the likelihood of attaining the end that is sought.

■ CONTEXTUAL CUES

As the title of the exercise indicates, it is an opener. It is best done as participants convene.

■ DURATION

The exercise takes about half an hour, including postactivity discussion.

■ OPTIMAL GROUP SIZE

A group to 12 to 20 is optimal. Larger groups can be subdivided into smaller groups as long as members of these smaller groups work together.

■ PROPS

Newsprint sheets with an easel and Magic Markers.

■ PREPARATION

None needed.

PROCESS ■

Participants write a few words or phrases or a sentence on newsprint sheets—or alternatively, they could draw a quick sketch—to capture the essence of what the whole group should achieve by the close of the staff development session or sessions they are embarking on together. These sheets are then posted on the wall, and the whole group divides into small groups of 3 to integrate these different encapsulations into one embracing statement. Each group of 3 writes its statement on a separate newsprint sheet. Groups of 3 then combine into groups of 6, and within a few minutes, integrate the ideas of the two groups into one set of envisioned outcomes.

Then the entire group reassembles and in no more than 10 minutes, draws together the common threads among the envisioned outcomes developed by the groups of 3 and 6. It is important that the participants not make the task overly complicated. Carefully wordsmithed, comprehensive statements to which all are in total agreement are not necessary. Rather, participants should move quickly, seek rough consensus, and frame approximate intentions.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION ■

1. What elements of our quickly drawn statement of envisioned outcomes do we want to be sure to retain as guidance for our work in the next weeks or months?
2. What's missing from this quickly drawn consensual statement?
3. What was helpful and useful about the process we used to arrive at the statement, and thus might serve us well as we seek to integrate our diverse intentions going forward?
4. What was *not* helpful and useful, and might help us better understand how to integrate our diverse intentions going forward?
5. What are the possible applications of this exercise for our school staff meetings?
6. Are there fit applications of this exercise to classroom work, i.e., to gain the broad support of students for the achievement of certain learning outcomes in advance of classroom work?

Context Map

■ PURPOSE AND RATIONALE

This exercise draws participants' attention to the array of constituencies that form an encircling sphere of influence for school operations. Awareness of the full range of influential constituencies and an initial sense of which constituencies play the most dominant roles provide useful insight to participants as they proceed with initiatives that grow out of their development work.

An underlying assumption of all of these exercises is that participants intend to make a difference, that they intend to alter their practices on behalf of improved teaching and learning. Such shifts will have political ramifications. Participants thus need to be as politically aware and as strategic as possible in their thinking and actions.

■ CONTEXTUAL CUES

This exercise is best done after the participants have arrived at an emerging sense of the directions in which they are headed. It is not an opener because it implicitly focuses on constraints rather than aspirations.

■ DURATION

The exercise takes about half an hour, including postactivity discussion.

■ OPTIMAL GROUP SIZE

A group of 12 to 20 is easily manageable, although larger groups can do the exercise as long as it is well facilitated.

■ PROPS

Newsprint sheets with Magic Markers and masking tape to post the sheets.

PREPARATION ■

None needed.

PROCESS ■

The whole group divides into small working groups of 3 to 4 participants each. In the small groups, participants list on newsprint sheets the major constituencies—parents, central office, the union, and so forth—that influence the school's work with students. After making this initial list, the groups make a second, more refined list. On the left side of the newsprint sheet are the constituencies listed in priority order that *are* the most influential. On the right side of the sheet are the constituencies listed in priority order that *should be* the most influential.

The whole group reconvenes and reviews the lists generated by the small groups. It briefly discusses the results, identifying differences between the lists of constituencies and differences between those who are influential as opposed to those who should be. To the extent it can be done, the group reconciles differences among the lists, composing two newsprint sheets, one that records all the constituencies listed by the small groups and a second that divides those that are influential from those that should be.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION ■

1. Looking at the big picture, how might we describe the sphere of influence in which we are operating?
2. Which constituencies do we see as having the greatest influence over whether our work can come to fruition?
3. Which constituencies do we see as deserving more influence over whether our work can come to fruition?
4. What might we do to level the playing field between those with more influence and those with less?
5. What should we do with what we have learned from this exercise, e.g., reflect on, and possibly change, our aspirations; review and shift our strategies; develop a new approach to communicating with certain constituencies?

The “View From Downtown”

■ PURPOSE AND RATIONALE

This exercise helps participants gain perspective on the political viability of the directions they are considering for improved teaching and learning in the school. This exercise focuses the critical faculties of participants on the question of what those in positions of authority might think about emerging ideas to improve teaching and learning in the school.

■ CONTEXTUAL CUES

This exercise is best done after the participants have arrived at a sense of the directions in which they are headed. It is not an opener because it implicitly draws the attention of participants to constraints rather than aspirations.

■ DURATION

The exercise takes about half an hour, including postactivity discussion.

■ OPTIMAL GROUP SIZE

A group of 12 to 20 is best, although multiple groups of 12 to 20 from different schools or different units in a school can conduct the exercise.

■ PROPS

Newsprint sheets with Magic Markers and masking tape to post the sheets.

PREPARATION ■

One or more participants compose a few sentences about proposals that are emerging from the group regarding the improvement of teaching and learning in their school or school unit.

PROCESS ■

The whole group divides into small working groups of 3 to 4 for consideration of the following questions:

- How would school district leaders view our emerging proposals, in terms of their most prominent role-related concerns? How would union or association leaders view our emerging proposals, in terms of their most prominent role-related concerns?
- How would parent, business, and community leaders view our emerging proposals, in terms of their most prominent role-related concerns?
- How would these groups view the impact of our work here on the quality of teaching and learning in the school?
- To what extent would these groups label our work as serving purposes they see as legitimate?

After the small groups have spent about 15 minutes on these five questions, they quickly jot down on newsprint sheets a set of bullet points for each of the five questions. The whole group reconvenes and considers the results of the small-group work.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION ■

1. In summary, what does the "view from downtown" look like?
2. What are the implications of this "view from downtown"?
3. How can we be responsive to the "view from downtown" without taking away from the integrity of our proposals?
4. Are we spending our time the way we should be? If not, how should we adjust our development efforts?
5. Are there others we should involve directly or indirectly in our development efforts to be sure we have a broad enough perspective built in?

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

E-xplore by Association

■ PURPOSE AND RATIONALE

This exercise engages participants in an alternative, Web-based process of inquiry that they can use to inform each other of important developments related to their joint improvement project. The essential aim here is capacity building, through the identification of knowledge bases outside participants' normal purview. Maximizing the use of resources, from both outside and inside their work contexts, is integral to the successful pursuit of participants' development objectives.

■ CONTEXTUAL CUES

The exercise is best done when participants are in the midst of formulating initiatives as an outgrowth of their joint development work. It is not an opener but an element that supports an emergent agenda.

■ DURATION

The exercise takes about half an hour of participants' time prior to a face-to-face session, then about half an hour for the face-to-face session itself.

■ OPTIMAL GROUP SIZE

A group of 12 to 20 is optimal, although larger groups can be subdivided into smaller groups of about the same size, as long as members of these groups share a common assignment.

■ PROPS

Access to the World Wide Web; an easel with newsprint sheets and Magic Markers.

PREPARATION ■

Participants need a degree of skill in performing Web searches.

PROCESS ■

Participants agree to surf the Web before their next face-to-face session in search of Web resources that will inform the issues before them. Major educational associations and the network of regional educational research and development laboratories are the primary targets of this search. Each participant brings to the session the best piece of information—research, perspective, or commentary—that she can find on the major topics to be dealt with in this next series of staff development sessions. Participants should also be prepared to identify the association that appeared to have the best set of resources. Finally, they should outline on a sheet of paper the search process they used to secure the resources noted above.

When participants arrive for their face-to-face session, they present in writing on newsprint sheets what they learned from their Web research, using bullet points rather than extended text. After the sheets are taped to the wall, participants review the sum total of their collective research effort. One of the participants agrees to compose a summary that eliminates overlap and notes appropriate Web addresses. This can be put in the form of an email communication to all participants or placed on the staff's common Web site.

Finally, participants engage in a short conversation that allows some of their number to recount the path they followed to find these Web resources.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION ■

1. To what extent have we garnered from this exercise additional resources we did not have before?
2. To what extent did these resources advance our substantive agenda, adding to our repertoire for addressing difficult teaching and learning challenges?
3. How useful was the methodology employed?
4. If useful, how can we ensure that it will be incorporated into our learning and development as we go forward?
5. How can this approach to group research be applied in the classroom?

Unheard Voices

■ PURPOSE AND RATIONALE

This exercise focuses participants' attention on constituencies that the school has been unable to reach or has reached only intermittently. The aim here is for participants to identify these unheard voices, search out individuals who might express them, and find out what they have to say about the school.

One of the greatest challenges confronting educational professionals is to circumvent the "squeaky wheels" in the school's communication network and make a connection with those who are silent, yet whose voices deserve to be heard and whose interests should be served.

■ CONTEXTUAL CUES

This exercise is not an opener. It provokes inquiry that should be conducted once a possible initiative is under serious consideration and is thus deserving of scrutiny from all perspectives.

■ DURATION

The exercise takes about half an hour of the group's time; it demands about an hour of each participant's time before the group convenes.

■ OPTIMAL GROUP SIZE

A group of 12 to 20 is best, although it is possible to do the exercise with much larger groups, as long as smaller discussion groups are formed for the face-to-face session. Each of the smaller groups could then report its findings to the larger group, which would then attempt to summarize the entire yield of the effort.

■ PROPS

None needed.

PREPARATION ■

Each participant agrees to identify, locate, and interview a representative member of one of the constituency groups the school is supposed to be serving but is rarely, if ever, heard from. The constituent could be a parent, a businessperson, a senior citizen, or a member of a disenfranchised ethnic or religious group. The main criterion for the choice is that the constituent's perspective is infrequently inserted into the ongoing deliberations concerning the school. The questions for reflection listed below can serve as both a rough guide for these one-on-one interviews and an organizing tool for the group discussion after the interviews.

PROCESS ■

Participants gather for a staff development session and make brief oral reports on their individual interviews with rarely-heard-from constituents. If the number of participants is manageable, this can be done with the whole group. If the number of participants is large, then it should be done in small groups and these groups would then report back to the whole group.

When all participants have made their reports, the whole group breaks into groups of 3 to 4 for intense discussions of what they have just heard. The questions below, used as a common interview protocol, are also meant as an organizing device for these discussions. After the small groups have mulled over the interview reports, the whole group reconvenes and summarizes the discussions of the small groups.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION ■

1. How much is known about the school, its programs, and its outreach efforts?
2. How was this knowledge acquired?
3. Would the constituent feel comfortable visiting the school?
4. What school-sponsored program or activity would draw the attention or compel the participation of the constituent?
5. How would decision making concerning the school shift if the constituent's voice were inserted into deliberations on a regular basis?

Blame Game

■ PURPOSE AND RATIONALE

This exercise encourages participants to let go of perceived past transgressions. The persistent yet tacit presence of these in the organizational environment inhibits staff from charting and pursuing new directions on behalf of children and youth. Ancient wisdom from the *Tao te Ching* expresses the key point most succinctly:

If you blame someone else, there is no end to the blame.

Unless participants can transcend what is a recognized norm of organizational existence—blaming each other for a variety of ills with which they have had to contend—they will make only halting progress in creating new schemes for advancing the school's mission. The intent is simple—to create a psychological opening for a group to begin anew with each other. Put another way, the aim is not to relieve anyone of responsibility for prior actions; rather, it is to invite all participants to create a better balance between the personal and professional, the individual and the systemic. By acknowledging the need for depersonalization, participants can take a small positive step in the direction of doing things differently in the future than they were done in the past.

■ CONTEXTUAL CUES

This exercise requires considerable sensitivity and discretion and may not be useful to all school staffs engaged in a development endeavor. If chosen, its best placement might be as a leadoff to an intermediate or late session. Having cited this caution, it is also worth noting that the exercise can be quite thought provoking and liberating for participants seeking to identify common ground and initiate a collective effort on behalf of improved teaching and learning.

■ DURATION

The exercise takes about 45 minutes, including postactivity discussion.

OPTIMAL GROUP SIZE ■

A group of 12 to 20 is optimal, although it can be done with larger groups if divided into smaller groups whose members share a common assignment.

PROPS ■

None needed.

PREPARATION ■

None needed.

PROCESS ■

On a 3 × 5 card, participants write a brief statement that describes a prior incident or interaction in which they were directly involved (one incident or interaction per card). The incident description should end with this sentence: "Were it not for the actions of (name of the person), the outcome would have been more positive." Participants place these cards in a cardboard box and then initiate a discussion with each other on what the fate of the box should be. For this discussion, the box remains closed. It would be a highly evolved group that could venture forth into discussing the box's contents as written. Yet there are still a variety of options for the group to discuss, replete with implications that deserve discussion. Examples include the following:

- Burn the box.
- Toss it.
- Keep it in a safe place outside the room where the staff development session is taking place.
- Keep it in the room as staff development sessions take place, then destroy it.
- Ask an outsider to read what's in it and summarize the types of incidents noted, without making any reference to the identities of the writers or the persons mentioned.

A whole-group discussion ensues that focuses on the questions for reflection below.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION ■

1. What did we determine to do with the box?
2. By what process was this decision reached?

3. To what extent was our process of decision making satisfactory?
4. What are the implications of our decision? That is, what are our intentions with regard to dealing with past transgressions?
5. To what extent can we now agree on a new path for our work together, less strewn with some of the negative aspects of the past?
6. What impact will this exercise have on our joint efforts?
7. What would be the result of doing this exercise in a class with students?

Exercise 30

Standing Offer

PURPOSE AND RATIONALE ■

This last exercise is meant to foster trust among participants. It invites participants to position their professional relationships around common commitments. For some participants, this exercise presents the possibility of a fresh start; for others, the potential for expanded collaboration. The simple axiom at work here is that cooperation is built when all participants have to extend themselves past the halfway mark in their relationships with colleagues.

CONTEXTUAL CUES ■

This exercise is not an opener. Rather, it should be inserted when participants have achieved a degree of common ground, i.e., have reached tentative agreement on a joint agenda for improved teaching and learning in the school.

DURATION ■

The exercise takes about half an hour, including postactivity discussion.

OPTIMAL GROUP SIZE ■

A group of 12 to 20 works best, although it can be done with larger groups if divided into smaller groups whose members work together.

PROPS ■

An easel with newsprint sheets and Magic Markers.

PREPARATION ■

A dash of forethought on the part of all participants.

■ PROCESS

At an appropriate juncture in one of the concluding development sessions, each participant presents a verbal "standing offer" to the whole group. The offer should relate to the emerging agenda of the group regarding improved teaching and learning schoolwide. The offer could be the provision of expert advice to colleagues in an area where the participant is expert. It could be a tangible contribution to a schoolwide learning theme, such as a display of photographs or artifacts from a recent overseas experience. It could be anything, as long as it advances the common cause.

When all participants have made an offer, each pairs off with a colleague whose offer runs along similar lines. Pairs discuss the offers in more detail, focusing specifically on how they can ensure that they are implemented and honored.

After these brief discussions, the whole group reconvenes to address the questions that follow.

■ QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. What was the overall effect of this activity?
2. How might we characterize the spirit in which it was conducted?
3. To what extent will the sum total of the offers advance our common agenda?
4. To what extent did the exercise open up new opportunities for collaboration between us as school professionals?
5. What difference did it make that we paired off to discuss the offers?
6. What have we learned about effective approaches to assessing the extent to which the offers are implemented and achieve their intended effects?
7. How might this exercise be adapted to a teacher's work with students?

Choosing Appropriate Exercises

In this section, I offer four vignettes that highlight significant issues regarding the use of the activities presented in Part II. Because the approach indicated by the activities is different from the traditional mode of initiating and supporting staff development efforts, it presents novel considerations and intriguing decision points for users. Rather than just launching activities “the way we always have”—with well-worn beginnings or perhaps with no preliminaries at all—users of the activities like the ones outlined in this book have to accept discomfort, court risk, adopt an experimental mind-set, and accept trial and error as a given. In a phrase, they need to *think hard and stay loose*.

Ultimately, however, users should take heart. Small doses of thoughtfulness will almost always yield positive results. And these results will instill confidence. As confidence builds, a wider variety of exercises can be attempted and an increasing percentage will have the impact sought. Most important, the very act of reflecting carefully on how to more artfully support staff development will make for marked progress toward organizational learning. In other words, the process of choosing exercises, using them, and reflecting on their appropriateness exhibits exactly the sort of self-conscious decision making that Peter Senge would see as beneficial to school improvement.

Ah, positive results!! Yes, that is what this book intends for those who want to do staff development differently. The leading positive result is a stronger foundation within the school for collaborative work—a larger number of staff voices being expressed more openly, a bent toward greater honesty in the room, a more level playing field in which each participant’s unique contribution can be honored by colleagues, regardless of position or title.

As a session leader, I can sense in a room the movement from passivity of the majority to active engagement of the majority, from a pervasive quiet reserve to a more unbridled enthusiasm, from general guardedness to unqualified forthrightness. When these start to emerge, then I know that the first half hour’s stage-setting exercise or the midway capping exercise

has been well worth the time and energy it took to choose it and implement it confidently and cheerfully.

Over the years, I have come to accept that I will not know *exactly* how to begin a session or to advance its momentum until I show up and see everyone's faces. This does not mean that I fail to prepare. Quite the contrary, I remain consistently armed with anywhere from two to five possible activities in my mind, ready to deploy the one or ones that seem right for the group and the moment when I am caught up in it.

For a small group of colleagues who have commissioned one of their number to launch a staff development session, the choice of the most appropriate exercise will be relatively easy. The session leader will know many if not all of the participants and thus can make better educated guesses than I would as a newcomer to a group. When conducting a session with a group that I have never met, I am almost always trying to play catch-up, actively in search of clues about who the participants are as people and how they function as a group. Prior knowledge about the participants makes choosing appropriate activities considerably easier.

In either case—whether staff development occurs with outside facilitation or with the aid of a colleague—the person who takes the lead will have to be on her toes, operating mentally above the heads of her colleagues, acting on their behalf to decide on an exercise that will meet their needs, engage their energies, and advance their understanding of organizational learning concepts. The attention paid to building these kinds of capacities within a group pays off in innumerable ways because they exemplify those needed to sustain organizational learning.

Here are some questions I use to assess the context in which the exercises will be carried out.

- How forthcoming are these participants likely to be with personal information? Will they be comfortable, for example, talking about famous or infamous ancestors?
- How inclined are they to be playful? Will they go along with "Animal Attributes," or will they resist it, thinking it is just aimless and silly?
- Do some or all of the participants appreciate the potential of metaphor to shed light on their work and their working relationships?
- Can the participants discuss a topic without interrupting each other or talking over each other? That is, do they exhibit rudimentary discussion etiquette?
- Is there a group norm, even if incipient, that honors the capacity to reflect, the ability to step back and make sense of what is happening as it is happening?
- What is the group norm on the use of humor—does humor come into play at all? Is it deployed to lighten the load, or is it used mostly for mutual deprecation?
- Is there a clear pecking order in the room reflected in the fact that many participants look to the titular leader for permission to express themselves?

- Alternatively, does there seem to be a level playing field for participation in which all participants have roughly equal standing in terms of expressing ideas and offering perspectives?

In reviewing these considerations, I do not mean to imply that groups need to hire trained facilitators to choose and lead supportive staff development exercises for them, on the assumption that only trained facilitators can make sound judgments on these matters. Quite the contrary, trusted colleagues can do as good a job as a trained facilitator in my view. In fact, as I have said above, colleagues making such judgments on behalf of colleagues might well move a school staff more quickly toward realizing learning organization principles. That selected staff members are trusted to serve the learning interests of the whole group is in fact an important part of overall group effectiveness. One or more members supporting the learning of the whole group—simple as this idea seems, it is integral to top-level staff performance.

The main task for colleagues acting as session planners and implementers is to consider such matters as those listed above and distill their interpretations into a choice of activities that they believe will serve the common good. The rest of the participants need only to come to staff development sessions prepared to do something new and different. Thus, using her knowledge of her colleagues' backgrounds, the chosen facilitator selects an appropriate exercise or two from this book, or from other texts, and takes responsibility for carrying it out within the context of ongoing staff development.

Suffice it to say, it is not a good idea for the whole group to convene and attempt to identify an activity that makes sense to do in the moment in which the group finds itself. The operant idea advocated here is thoughtful preparation. This is essential to ensure that participants' time will be well spent. Just as a teacher would not begin a class by asking for a quick consensus decision on how best to proceed, a self-taught group bent on its own learning must establish fit mechanisms to ensure that thoughtfulness is brought to bear before learning gets under way.

VIGNETTE 1: NARROWING THE GENERATION GAP

I had worked with this school staff before, in a two-hour staff development session a few months back. The principal focus had been team building through activities centered on developing solid discussion skills, incipient reflective capacities, and an ethic of mutual support. In that short session, participants had managed to establish a crude foundation for collaborative work, but not much more than that. If they were going to build on that foundation and expand and refine their emerging collaborative capacities, much



more work needed to be done. From what group members said, they were eager to move forward and craft a schoolwide approach to teaching and learning, one to which all of the teachers would subscribe and from whose coherence the students would clearly benefit.

Further, several staff members expressed the hope that this follow-up encounter could also help to integrate members with fewer years of service at the school with those who had served the school for a considerable time. While all the members had similar teaching responsibilities, a widely held perception was that the more senior members had a significantly stronger commitment to the mission of the school than those less senior. On the other side of the coin, the more junior members were perceived to have a greater commitment to innovative approaches than those more senior.

A fairly common scenario—this sort of generation gap exists within many school staffs. Its negative effects can be quite pronounced, and by corollary, its positive potential is rarely exploited. Often, the negative effects are more severe to the extent that differences have been pushed underground, less severe to the extent that a staff is willing to agree explicitly that differences exist and need to be surfaced, discussed, honored, and exploited in the service of the school's mission.

The last time I worked with this group, we had all begun the session on our feet, each member paired with one of their colleagues in concentric circles—the inner circle looking out, the outer circle looking in (see Kaagan, *Leadership Games*, p. 68, for a full description of this exercise). This allowed participants to have multiple discussions, one after the other, as one or the other circle rotated, and as paired participants conversed in response to prompts I had prepared ahead of time. The prompts had been fairly generic strategic planning queries such as teaching and learning directions they thought might be profitably pursued, specific initiatives to support those directions, constraints to be faced in the process, and collaborations identified to support progress.

In this follow-up session, whose main purpose was to hone in more concretely on strategic directions that all members could support—both those more senior and those more junior—I thought it might make sense to have participants learn some things about each other, not just professionally but personally. I also thought it would be helpful if we undertook to understand better how each member could serve as a resource to colleagues' learning. The former focus, I believed, could instill greater mutual appreciation within the group for what they were like as people, regardless of age or term of service. The latter was more directly related to the agenda they had set for the meeting—common approaches to teaching and learning.

While the latter purpose was more closely related to their self-assigned task, it seemed to me that the former, if fulfilled, might well make the accomplishment of the latter easier. In fact, I was convinced after the last session that they had "gotten down to business" too quickly and had not availed themselves of preliminary mutual understanding and appreciation that in turn might have facilitated more rapid progress on their agenda.

To fulfill the preliminary aim—increased mutual familiarity—I saw a couple of possibilities. "Surprise Me" and "Ancestors" were my top choices. For the second, clearly functional aim, I saw advantages in "E-xplore Assets" and also "Best and Worst." In fact, as I pondered it, "Surprise Me" and "Best and Worst" could have a positive yield with regard to both purposes.

"Surprise Me" seemed a solid choice because although the participants had worked with each other for a period of time, they lived in diverse locales, hailed from different teacher education programs, and thus knew each other only somewhat superficially. Perhaps asking them to unearth something about themselves from nonprofessional contexts, or past lives, would increase their familiarity with each other as people and their appreciation of the diverse backgrounds of the collected set of actors in the room. It might also loosen them up a bit, which seemed a helpful step. But "Ancestors" had many of the same advantages. And having them disclose a bit of their past to each other might ease them into the more difficult tasks ahead—finding common ground on educational directions to be pursued.

I chose "Ancestors" to start off, followed a bit later, after the session got under way, by "Best and Worst." I chose the former over "Surprise Me" because I thought it would push participants toward slightly more personal disclosures. Unfortunately, it may have been the wrong choice. The group was mildly impatient with this attempt at increasing familiarity and expressed this by what seemed like an infectious reluctance to volunteer. Once into the activity, though, I pressed ahead, even to the point of cajoling a few responses when there was only a handful.

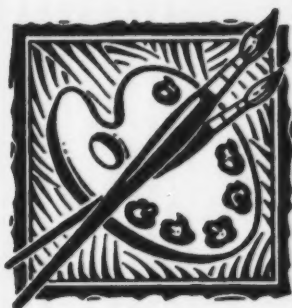
The debrief of "Ancestors," while hardly profound, was considerably more substantive than the responses to the exercise prompt had been. We had a solid discussion of the way in which the world has changed, from ancestral times to now. And there were a few intriguing speculations about how our descendents might depict their ancestors in a similar activity were it conducted 50 years hence. There were also a couple of useful reflections on the implications of this kind of "perspective stretching" for the direction setting they were about to undertake together. I made a quick judgment that while the activity had unfolded in a halting manner, participants

gleaned more than I had expected and felt the beginnings of bondedness in the face of their generational divide.

"Best and Worst," in contrast, was an unqualified success. Participants enthusiastically shared stories and even humorously applied some first names to particularly difficult children. There was vibrancy in the discourse and spats of laughter that were quite refreshing. Not surprisingly, more boys than girls showed up among the "worst" students they had encountered. At the same time, it was intriguing to see representatives of both generations seeing eye to eye on several of their best and worst "actors" to the point that they actually believed they had more similar than dissimilar inclinations when it came to their principal clientele.

In sum, it was a positive development to retrace some steps that might well have been taken in the first session. And the main objectives of increasing familiarity and overcoming some intergenerational suspicion had been accomplished. Certainly there was more to do, especially on this latter objective, but the stage was set for further efforts. The group now seemed ready and willing to "get down to work," despite the fact that they thought they already had begun the work the previous week.

VIGNETTE 2: DEEPENING THE DISCOURSE



A group of 25 teachers and administrators from different schools in a sprawling geographic region assembled in order to refine their thinking on an initiative they had been working on together for almost two years—teacher leadership. Teacher leadership, briefly defined, involves intense cooperative initiative taking by the teaching staff of a school to carry out projects intended to benefit all students in the school.

This group had worked together before, but now they were seeking to take their work to a higher level. They not only needed each other's support, they needed each other's substantive perspective on goals for school-level projects and on effective strategies for accomplishing and evaluating these goals. With only slight nudging from me before the meeting, they decided to spark their efforts by first establishing a visual context for their work with each other. They used the yield from this activity to seek a better understanding of the assumptions that seemed to be driving their work on teacher leadership. Specifically, they did "Vision Sketch" and followed up with the more cerebral "Listening for Assumptions."

Armed with newsprint and Magic Markers, they managed to depict, in a half-hour's time, prominent aspects of the projects small

groups of staff members had embarked on. While incomplete, the quick sketches were impressive for the time spent—full of images suggestive of the potential benefits of their projects. Taken together, they formed a provocative rendering of collective action on the part of teachers in widely diverse school and community settings.

The next half hour was consumed with "Listening for Assumptions." With the vision sketches posted around the room, there was as much looking as there was listening for assumptions. As two volunteers described the project emphases they depicted through their quick sketches, the other members of the group listened carefully. Then they responded with observations that spoke to what they believed were key underlying assumptions, drawn from what they heard and saw. Two additional volunteers wrote out these initial assumptions on newsprint and posted them beside the sketches on the wall.

The group then decided to take a long break to digest the essence of what they had just done and speculate on its implications. This pause, aided by "The Fruits of Silence," was integral to their joint work. It was not just time away from the work; it was time for the participants to reflect on what they had done—to view their sketches more carefully and reflect on their initial rendering of assumptions.

By now, the group clearly was feeling that they were off on the right foot. There was considerable positive energy in the room. One might even say that there was a sense of fullness. Participants had been able to catch up quickly with the progress of their various initiatives on teacher leadership. There had been an injection of inspiration for what they hoped to achieve and a pervasive appreciation for what each participant brought to the table. Most important, they had artfully set that table for the remaining hours they were to spend with each other. The yield from the quick sketches, backed up by their initial probe of assumptions, served as rich grist for participants to analyze where they had been and what a few of their leading motivations were. These served as solid bases for deciding the future direction they wanted to pursue and the strategies they would deploy.

A session that might otherwise have started slowly and haltingly had begun with a burst. This was quite simply due to 10 minutes of thoughtful review and planning by a couple of the group members. Essentially, these planners conceived of their colleagues as an important set of constituents whose interests they were commissioned to serve. They understood that participants had been off in their own schools working on their separate projects, and that probably they had lost touch with each other. They also knew that the mission that bound them together was still intact and that probably what the group needed most was a quick mutual catch-up, a rekindling of

enthusiasm. But they knew, too, that they needed something else—a reminder that the school projects were manifestations of ideas that needed constant tending and revision.

So three vehicles were chosen to meet these needs—"Vision Sketch," "Listening for Assumptions," and "The Fruits of Silence." By comparison, a more traditional roster of activities would have entailed all participants sitting in a circle, going around the room doing reintroductions, and then providing verbal show-and-tells on the status of their projects. These more traditional steps would likely have consumed a couple of hours and been relatively tedious. Instead, the group, via selected representatives, had opted for accelerated understanding through a development session that offered crisp visual presentations, deepened listening through a common search for underlying assumptions, and an appreciation of the productive potential of silence.



VIGNETTE 3: TRAVERSING UNFAMILIAR TERRITORY

The place is Vietnam. I had been asked to facilitate a series of team development activities for university professors, elementary and secondary teachers, and administrators from all three levels. This mixed group was associated with a regional university and multiple schools within its service area. The schools and university were engaged with each other in an exciting project to bring more active forms of teaching and learning to both. The project leadership believed that effective teamwork was essential to the success of the project.

This vignette speaks to the difficulties inherent in group work that takes place on unfamiliar cultural ground—whether this ground is a remote country or a school in a different local community. Surprises can be in store for staff development designers in both contexts. Granted, it may be slightly easier for local designers to decide on appropriate ways to support staff development sessions in more familiar surroundings. At the same time, many of the same kinds of challenges that were present in the unfamiliar environment of Vietnam also tend to appear in contexts with which one is purportedly more familiar. The argument here is that the opportunities presented in this book will inevitably thrust the reader into an arena replete with subtle cultural cues. Many of these are hard to discern, regardless of the extent of one's familiarity with the environment.

The first of my nine days with completely new colleagues who did not speak the same language or share the same cultural norms, and whose organizations ran in ways quite mysterious to me,

was daunting. Where to begin? Participants gathered in a large conference room that was air-conditioned, but only sporadically. The temperature outside was over 95 degrees Fahrenheit, the relative humidity around 95 percent. Inside, there were about 35 participants. How to get under way?

I was inclined to do any one of three activities—"Pushpins," "Beginning at the End," or "Rotating Pencils." Instinctively, I wanted us all to be on our feet at the outset, or at the very least, for participants to do something active with their bodies. It struck me at the time that this single initiating element—people on their feet to start—would send a strong signal that this session was to be different from others they had attended. I was banking on the likelihood that the Vietnamese are as accustomed to "sit and git" staff development sessions as Americans. Further, if the aim was active teaching and learning, why not begin with an active endeavor?

So this line of thinking made me lean toward "Pushpins" or "Rotating Pencils." Yet at the same time, I wanted the participants to focus at the outset on where this workshop was headed. Thus, "Beginning at the End," more cerebral than the first two, could also have served this purpose. Meanwhile, as concerned as I was with signaling a shift from the traditional mode, I was equally concerned that the first things we did together be a bridge between the more traditional, which I had surmised participants were expecting, and the less traditional, which would dominate our work together. A final consideration was that I wanted us to do an exercise that offered the gift of metaphor—so integral to active teaching and learning, the focus of this nine-day effort.

In the end, I decided to be a bit bolder than "Beginning at the End" or "Rotating Pencils" and went for "Pushpins"—the most active beginning, and one replete with metaphor. This choice was based less on pedagogical grounds than on practical concerns. I wanted to learn some basic background details about my new colleagues and thought it might be good for them to learn some of these things about each other.

So, with improvised highway cones, I laid out a map of the region of Vietnam that surrounds the university, with place-names that I pronounced haltingly and with some embarrassment in my introduction. Then I asked the assembled group a couple of questions such as where did they go to school and what place did they associate with the sparking of their interest in teaching. Participants milled about a bit, but they did what I asked, using their bodies as pushpins on a map of southern Vietnam. As they responded to each question, friendly chatter broke out to compete with the obvious mild confusion. These effects then morphed into a sense of anticipation mixed with curiosity.

We then engaged in a sustained interchange for about half an hour (about 15 minutes without mutual translations). The focus was almost exclusively on what the database they had just created with "human pushpins" said about who they were as a group—their essential demographics and a rough summary of their professional motivations and interests.

Blissfully, from my point of view, there were a couple of instances where participants discovered that they had attended the same school or relied on the same spark for career decision making, albeit at different times. So there was welcome serendipity, a bit of joy in the wake of surprise. This was the sort of unanticipated outcome for which I am always grateful. In a group where people think they know all they need to know to work with each other effectively, they suddenly come upon a small kernel of shared experience they did not know existed. This small kernel can actually promote productive collaboration. I have seen it happen over and over.

While participants had shown initial trust and some signs of a positive spirit appeared in the room as we got under way, I remained unconvinced that they had digested or accepted the basic idea of using direct experience as a foundation for concept formation. That would be a startling and unexpected outcome from an initiating exercise. But internal wrestling with the idea seemed to have begun.

VIGNETTE 4: DIMINISHING DIVISIVENESS

The group I would be working with had a history of internal divisiveness that at times had resulted in open disagreements, some of which had turned hostile. They were a diverse group of education and social service professionals who worked in a small rural area in Michigan in which everyone seemed to know each other well—perhaps too well.

The aim of their staff development sessions was to develop a strategy for improved coordination and cooperation between the schools and the social service agencies that served the children in the schools. The group was fairly large, about 60 people.

I approached the sessions with three interrelated challenges—getting them to listen more carefully to each other before jumping to negative conclusions; having them see their differing perspectives and priorities as assets rather than liabilities when it came to strategy formulation; and getting them to appreciate each other's context and constraints, as professionals with diverse portfolios. In an overarching sense, I wanted them to be able to transcend the



contentiousness of their past relationships and move toward an ethic of collaboration.

In the first of several sessions with them, I had done a series of warm-up exercises that I thought would open them up to more advanced work. Now in this session, to make a start at addressing the first challenge, I thought that it might be useful to do "Listening for Assumptions." With a group of 60, this would require breaking them into five or six small groups with each group finding a spot in the room where all could concentrate on the comments of the volunteer who would spark discussion. I decided to ask each volunteer to orient her comments to the heart of the challenge facing us—a more harmonized relationship between schools and social service agencies on behalf of students' achievement in school.

For the second and third challenges, I saw an interweaving of "E-xplore Assets" and "Dashing Duel Interview" as generating positive energy. After a bit of thought, I decided to use the prompting questions in "E-xplore Assets" as a platform for colleagues from different organizations to pair with each other and conduct live, rather than virtual, mutual interviews. Since it would have taken an inordinately long time to report out the results of 30 mutual interviews, I thought it wise to make use of four groups of 14 or 16. This could be accomplished with relative ease by asking two of the small groups that did "Listening for Assumptions" to join together. In my mind, the approach I was contemplating had the advantage of addressing the several challenges I had posed for myself. It also had the distinct advantage of reinforcing the simple organizational maxim that collaboration is built on the shoulders of two willing parties who choose to do something together.

With "Listening for Assumptions" and "Dashing Duel Interview" serving as warm-ups, I decided to attempt "Blame Game" to get directly at the overarching challenge noted above—transcending past tribulations.

Even as the session was about to start, I remained apprehensive about the use of "Blame Game." Was I going to be able to establish a minimal baseline of trust through the initial exercises of the day? Would the participants trust me enough to be forthright in their depictions of previous transgressions—forthright enough that there would be "bite" in the exercise as I held the box of transcribed transgressions over my head and asked what should be done with it and its contents?

Apprehensions aside, I decided to proceed. "Listening for Assumptions"—the first exercise after cursory introductions—was actually a fairly aggressive beginning. The small groups seemed to engage well with it, however. The decibel level was relatively high and sustained throughout; the discussions seemed earnest and

amicable. There was even a bit of humor bandied about—of the harmless, not the vitriolic, variety.

Then I followed as planned with an adapted version of “Dashing Dual Interview” in groups of about 14 to 16 each. Again the tenor seemed positive and the participants appeared to be genuinely interested in learning some new things about their colleagues.

Then I came to the “crux” of the first hour’s work—“Blame Game.” The truth is that I was surprised and gratified by the response. First, while I have no way of knowing how disclosing participants were on their 3 × 5 cards, the whispering that went on during the writing phase led me to believe that people were actively engaged.

Second, and most important, the 20-minute discussion that followed the collection and depositing of the cards in the box was the best I had encountered in a long time. It began with one person vigorously asserting that the box should be burned. Then, almost immediately, one or two others countered, suggesting that the box contained information that could be useful to the group in charting a new course, so that decidedly it should *not* be burned. A vibrant interchange among a number of participants then ensued on the merits of putting the past to rest and granting a general amnesty, versus capitalizing on the lessons of the past so as not to repeat mistakes.

In the end, the group asked me to review the contents of the box during the lunch period and provide them with a summary of the challenges they faced. I did what they asked and made a short presentation after lunch. What had begun as a risky warm-up to their strategy development session turned into a significant catharsis for many of the participants. Rather than acting on the negative energy contained in the renderings of the transgressions that filled the box, participants turned their attention to affirmative actions that might circumvent past transgressions and lead to efforts that would better serve the children and youth in their schools.

■ CONCLUDING COMMENTS

For educators seriously committed to professional improvement, there is good news in these vignettes. The scripts they follow are attributable to an impressive array of theorists, researchers, and commentators—mentioned in Part I of this book—who are in significant agreement about the kind of staff development necessary to support consequential school reform. The establishment of professional learning communities, the determination of development directions by the educators themselves, and the application of organizational learning concepts—these are among the key ingredients

that will lead to greater efficacy of school staff, and ultimately to more positive outcomes for students.

There is further good news in the exercises presented in Part II. Educators, bent on fulfilling prescriptions for positive change in staff development, can not only decide to accomplish the change themselves, they can do it at relatively little cost through a series of practical measures described herein. My explicit purpose in composing the exercises was to "breathe life" into a set of well-regarded ideas for shifting the overall approach to school staff development. Specifically, I wanted to show that such forms of staff development are possible and practical, and that educators can carry them out themselves by summoning their will and acting thoughtfully. The task is doable; the results will be well worth the effort.

Resource

Exercises Arranged by Topic and Purpose

Topic			
Purpose	Identifying Assets	Gaining Perspective	Fostering Change
Starter	Animal Attributes Ancestors Pushpins Dashing Dual Interview E-xplore Assets	Snapshots See	Begin, Begin, Begin Modest Expectations
Pause/ Reflection		Bringing the Outside In <i>Snapshots</i> Rotating Pencils Fruits of Silence	Rotating Pencils Informed Purpose
Advancement	Surprise Me	Instant History Best, Worst E-xplore Perspectives <i>Snapshots</i> Listening for Assumptions See Patchwork Perspectives Stakes Context Map The "View From Downtown"	Don't Surprise Me <i>Listening for Assumptions</i> <i>Patchwork Perspectives</i> Unheard Voices Blame Game Leadership Then, Now, Into the Future Vision Sketch <i>Informed Purpose</i> Beginning at the End Context Map The "View from Downtown" E-xplore by Association Standing Offer

NOTE: Some exercises are listed in more than one cell. When it appears more than once, the name of the exercise is in *italics*.

Bibliography

- Argyris, C. (1993). *On organizational learning*. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell.
- Barth, R. (2001). *Learning by heart: How can we bring order and excitement to the schoolhouse?* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Christensen, C., Garvin, D., & Sweet, A. (Eds.). (1991). *Education for judgment: The artistry of discussion leadership*. Boston: Harvard Business School Press.
- Crowther, F., Kaagan, S., Ferguson, M., & Hann, L. (2002). *Developing teacher leaders: How teacher leadership enhances school success*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Darling-Hammond, L. (1997). *The right to learn: A blueprint for creating schools that work*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Fullan, M. (2001). *The new meaning of educational change* (3rd ed.). New York: Teachers College Press.
- Fullan, M., & Hargreaves, A. (1996). *What's worth fighting for in your school?* New York: Teachers College Press.
- Guskey, T., & Huberman, M. (Eds.). (1995). *Professional development in education: New paradigms and practices*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Kaagan, S. (1999). *Leadership games: Experiential learning for organizational development*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Katzenbach, J., & Smith, D. (1993, March/April). The discipline of teams. *Harvard Business Review*.
- Lambert, L. (1998). *Building leadership capacity in schools*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Lieberman, A., & Miller, L. (Eds.). (2001). *Teachers caught in the action: Professional development that matters*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Sarason, S. (1996). *Revisiting "the culture of the school and the problem of change"* (series on school reform). New York: Teachers College Press.
- Schein, E. (1992). *Organizational culture and leadership*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Schon, D. (1983). *The reflective practitioner: How professionals think in action*. New York: Basic Books.
- Senge, P. (1990). *The fifth discipline: The art and practice of the learning organization*. New York: Doubleday.
- Senge, P., Cambron-McCabe, N., Lucas, T., Smith, B., Dutton, J., & Kleiner, A. (2000). *Schools that learn*. New York: Doubleday.

- Senge, P., Kleiner, A., Roberts, C., Ross, R., & Smith, B. (1994). *The fifth discipline fieldbook*. New York: Doubleday.
- Wald, P., & Castleberry, M. (Eds.). (2000). *Educators as learners: Creating a professional learning community in your school*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Watkins, K., & Marsick, V. (1993). *Sculpting the learning organization*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.



The Corwin Press logo—a raven striding across an open book—represents the happy union of courage and learning. We are a professional-level publisher of books and journals for K-12 educators, and we are committed to creating and providing resources that embody these qualities. Corwin's motto is "Success for All Learners."

ISBN: 0-7619-3884-2



9 780761 938842

BEST COPY AVAILABLE



U.S. Department of Education
Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI)
National Library of Education (NLE)
Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC)



NOTICE

Reproduction Basis

X

This document is covered by a signed "Reproduction Release (Blanket)" form (on file within the ERIC system), encompassing all or classes of documents from its source organization and, therefore, does not require a "Specific Document" Release form.



This document is Federally-funded, or carries its own permission to reproduce, or is otherwise in the public domain and, therefore, may be reproduced by ERIC without a signed Reproduction Release form (either "Specific Document" or "Blanket").